AntiCALVIN The Gospel Deficiency Of Calvinism

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Truth On Fire
The Gospel Deficiency of Reformed Theology
"A Glass Half Empty"



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Preface

The scope of this book is to expose the gospel deficiency of Reformed Theology, more commonly known as Calvinism. Reformed Theology is not the outgrowth of revelation, but of human rationalism and theological speculation as they are imposed upon scripture. In order for Reformed Theology, or Calvinism, to take hold in the mind of a believer, the student of scripture, in order to substantiate the errors of Calvinism, must violate biblical contexts and abandon intellectual honesty. The embrace of Reformed Theology constitutes a mental disorder. The content of this book will make that case.

It must be made clear that Gospel Deficiency does not attempt to portray Calvinists as enemies of the Gospel. It's the system of Calvinism that's the culprit. The Calvinist suffers from the same kind of un-gospel-like thinking that infected Peter and Barnabas at Antioch (Galatians 2:11-13). Peter was eating with Gentile believers until certain Jews sent from James came to town. Instead of holding fast to his fellowship standards according to the truth of the gospel, Peter modified his behavior, withdrawing and separating himself from uncircumcised Gentiles out of fear for circumcised Jews. Since the atonement of Christ meant there was no longer any circumcision or uncircumcision in Christ, Peter played the hypocrite, and dissimulated (2:13). Peter's behavior was un-gospel-like in that it sought to maintain distinctions the Cross had obliterated. Paul withstood Peter to the face for his overt inconsistency with gospel truth. Even Barnabas got “carried away” with the dissimulation. Both Peter and Barnabas were good, godly men. Yet both for a season were infected by an un-gospel-like mindset.

Calvinism with its doctrine of Particular Redemption likewise reflects an un-gospel-like mindset in that it limits to SOME an atonement scripture affirms was for ALL. There's no essential difference between hypocritical Peter and the Calvinist. While Peter was guilty of un-gospel-like behavior, the Calvinist is guilty of un-gospel-like doctrine. The goal of Gospel Deficiency is to make the case for that hypocrisy. As Peter and Barnabas were good men, so are many Calvinists who espouse the doctrines of Reformed Theology. Calvinists get “carried away” with un-gospel-like doctrine. Sadly, there's no apostle Paul on the scene to withstand these men. But we do have Paul's inspired writings, which are as good as Paul himself. We have attempted with Gospel Deficiency to allow scripture to withstand the dissimulation of Calvinism. When readers come across references to the Calvinist arguing this or believing that, they should take that as an indictment of Calvinism rather than the Calvinist himself. It's not personal; it's

theological. We have no desire whatsoever to denigrate Calvinists. But at the same time, Calvinists must bear some degree of accountability for gainsaying and modifying of gospel truth.

At the core of the gospel is the cross of Christ. On that cross, Jesus died for our sins, according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Reformed Theology contends that Jesus died for SOME, but not all. The atonement is therefore limited or particular in scope, applicable only to those for whom Jesus died. Herein lies the problem with Reformed Theology. If the gospel message is the good news that Jesus died for our sins, then Reformed Theology, which asserts that Jesus died for some but not all sinners, offers no gospel for those whom God chose to exclude from the atonement. At the risk of sounding cliched, this is not rocket science. If Christ did NOT die FOR your sins, he cannot save you FROM your sins. There is simply NO gospel for you. Yet Jesus told his disciples to preach the gospel to EVERY creature. If there is a gospel for every creature, then Jesus MUST have died for every creature.

Calvinists often remark about the 'glories' of Calvinism and the glory it gives to God alone inasmuch as he's sovereign. That sounds lofty enough. God is sovereign...period. But God is only as sovereign as the scriptures reveal him to be. It is the responsibility of a Bible student to rightly divide the Word and thereby represent God and his truth accurately. The problem with Calvinism is that it misrepresents the God it claims to honor. God is never glorified when he is misrepresented! For this reason, Calvinism does not and cannot bring glory to God. There are no glories in Calvinism!

The scope of this book is limited to the direct impact of Reformed Theology on the gospel. If you're looking for a more exhaustive treatment of Calvinism, the book The Other Side of Calvinism by Lawrence Vance will serve that purpose. In the volume by Vance, he includes a plethora of quotes by Calvinists for comparative purposes with extensive footnotes. There are any number of other works that attempt a more thorough refutation. Gospel Deficiency, by its design, contains very few quotes from Calvinists. We wanted to avoid littering these pages with philosophical drivel and give primacy to the scriptures. It is my hope the reader will find sufficient fodder within this volume to abandon any notion that Calvinism is a valid system of theological thought. You simply cannot embrace Reformed Theology with its theory of Particular Redemption and preach the apostolic gospel at the same time.

All scriptural quotes and references are from the 1611 King James Version (KJV). When use is made of the Greek to explain the meaning of a passage, it is done to compliment and clarify the English, not to correct it. I am wary of any alleged scholar or expositor who appeals

to the original languages (Hebrew and Greek) in an effort to obscure plain English and convince laypersons that the *prima facia* reading of their translation is somehow inferior. For that reason, the target audience of Gospel Deficiency is primarily the rank-and-file who occupy the pews, so they can avoid being bamboozled by a slick Calvinistic preacher or teacher armed with a quiver of philosophical arguments. If even one Calvinist comes to disavow his Calvinism, or a single Calvinistic pastor sees the gospel light and disinfects his church as a result of reading this book, that will be a blessed outcome. But I know of few Calvinists (other than myself) who, having been "carried away" with the un-gospel-like doctrines of Reformed Theology, have ever recovered from its rationalistic appeal.

This book is divided into three sections. The first section addresses directly the gospel deficiency of Reformed Theology with several targeted articles. The second consists of a collection of contextual articles, which I've entitled *Calvinism Cures*, written over the years, that address either directly or indirectly some erroneous aspect of Calvinism. In a handful of instances, the reader will find duplicate or similar comments made in different articles. This is because each article was originally written as a standalone document and not rewritten for Gospel Deficiency. But repetition is often the pathway to persuasion. The final section is a critical analysis of apologist James White's Calvinistic spin on John 3:16. We included this analysis because the thinking of James White is reflective of all Calvinists. James White is a gifted apologist for Christianity in general. But he, like Peter and Barnabas of old, has been "carried away" with the un-gospel-like speculations of Calvinism.

The content of this book in places juxtaposes the Biblicist and the Calvinist. Here's what we mean. The Biblicist is bound by CONTEXTUAL exegesis/exposition in ALL his interpretive work. His interpretive discipline includes the use of grammar, syntax, word studies and comparative scriptural analysis within biblical and historical contexts to arrive at truth. He is quick to dismiss theological tenets if solid contextual exposition does not support them. A Calvinist, on the other hand, is a compartmental template interpreter. While he may practice contextual exegesis in MOST cases, he's quick to jettison contextual truth when it contradicts his template. Since he believes the Five Points constitute the true (authentic) gospel, he MUST reject any contextual interpretation that deviates from the Five Points. If a young Bible college or seminary student is trained first and foremost to be a disciplined Biblicist, he will NEVER become a Calvinist. The two are mutually exclusive.

As one last matter of introduction, we must point out what is one of the great travesties of seminaries and Bible colleges. What they do to

first-year students and young preachers is near criminal. They often 'require' students to take Systematic Theology BEFORE exposing them to the exegetical/expository disciplines integral to Biblical Hermeneutics, which they often relegate to 'elective' status. The problem is further exacerbated by academic staff where NO disciplined Bible expositors exist. The reason institutions fail to teach their students sound, contextual Bible exposition is a lack of staff qualified to teach it. It's much easier to establish theological formulations with proof texts than it is to train a student to do the painstaking, intellectually honest work of contextual exposition.

The study of the “Decrees of God” is a case in point. The fact that God has 'decreed' certain things by his eternal counsel is indisputable. God clearly decreed to create, decreed to allow sin/death into his creation, decreed to provide a remedy for sin/death in the Person of his Son, decreed the two destinies for mankind (Heaven and the Lake of Fire), etc. A problem arises when men engage in speculation about the 'Order' in which God decreed things (not just the 'What' but the 'When'). Students then begin to wrestle with issues like 'Determinism' and whether they're Supralapsarian, Infralapsarian or Sublapsarian (profitless exercises). They might even feel compelled to establish a firm position on what scripture says is essentially unknowable. For all intents and purposes, this makes the neophyte Calvinist a modern-day Gnostic.

At the end of Romans 11, Paul declared that God's judgments were “unsearchable” and that his ways were “past finding out” (11:33). Yet Calvinism expends much of its energy claiming it's searched his judgments/ways and discovered what scripture says is undiscoverable. A seminary or Bible college student who embraces the system of Calvinism BEFORE he becomes a contextual Bible exegete/expositor will become a theological paraplegic.

It is FAR more important for a young preacher to develop intellectually honest CONTEXTUAL exegetical/expository skills than to embrace theological formulations based on proof texts. These formulations end up becoming a template one applies to passages of scripture. This is especially true of young preachers who attend Calvinistic schools with Calvinist professors. They graduate and enter upon their ministries with the Five Points ingrained in their thinking. So when they get to a salvation passage where the biblical writer employs the word “all” to represent the scope of Christ's atonement, their Calvinist template tells them it cannot mean 'all' as in every man, but rather 'all' within a limited group.

Section I: An Overview of

Calvinism

During my decades-long association with the system of Calvinism I have heard any number of adherents talk about the “glories” of Calvinism and the manner in which it properly affirms the “sovereignty” of God. Having been a five-point Calvinist on two occasions myself, I know and have made all the arguments.

This much is now clear to me. The person who commits himself to the Calvinist Camp differs not a dime from the Freemason who is smitten with the “secrets” of Freemasonry. Members of both groups believe they’re really on to something special that has heretofore eluded the rank-and-file. Many Calvinists often refer to fellow Five Pointers as “grace” men, implying that a failure, reluctance or refusal to embrace the Five Points of Calvinism amounts to a denial of grace. In the minds of many Calvinists, the Gospel of Grace is no gospel at all unless anchored in all Five Points. I have heard and read a number of Calvinists who claim the Gospel is the Five Points and the Five Points are the Gospel. If one takes this reasoning to its logical conclusion, the proof that one is saved is his or her embrace of the Five Points of Calvinism.

Most Calvinists will admit the Five Points stand or fall together, a cohesive package. If it fails in any one point, the whole system fails, falls apart. At least the Calvinist is intellectually honest enough to admit that. The truth is Calvinism fails in all Five Points, not just one. In an effort to prevent it from falling apart, the Calvinist must resort to intellectual dishonesty. This intellectual dishonesty manifests itself in the deceitful handling of scripture. It’s the practice of citing a verse of scripture as a 'proof text' in violation of its context. It’s assigning a meaning to the ‘proof text’ that the context disallows. When the Calvinist begins the “What do you do with this or that verse?” routine, the answer is simple. We ascertain the meaning of the text according to the context!

One of the foremost proponents of Calvinism in the present day is James White. I invite you to read: “James White on John3:14-18: An Analysis” in Section III. It's my fair and balanced analysis of his comments on the text in the form of end notes. They're slightly tedious in places, but worth wading through if you're interested in knowing the truth. They also expose the intellectual dishonesty that he and other Calvinists must employ to defend the indefensible and bamboozle the uninformed.

The Five Points of Calvinism are NOT rocket science. No “initiation” or special “enlightenment” is required to “get it” as some would say. They’re fairly straight forward. The most important fact is this: NONE

of them are substantiated by scripture! And if the philosophical system of Calvinism ever gets its hooks into an individual's thinking, he or she, by hook or by crook, will MAKE the scriptures substantiate them! The Bottom Line is this: God is NEVER glorified by that which misrepresents Him. If there IS a cardinal sin in Calvinism, it is that God is misrepresented. Let's briefly review the Five Points.

The acrostic TULIP is the most familiar way in which students of theology attempt to remember the Five Points of Calvinism: T = Total Depravity; U = Unconditional Election; L = Limited Atonement; I = Irresistible Grace; P = Perseverance of the Saints. A succinct overview of each and a few comments are in order. This presentation is not intended to be exhaustive, but simply a basic primer to the system of Calvinistic thought.

Total Depravity

In the system of Calvinism, the fallen man is spiritually destitute and absent the first iota of ability or desire to make a move toward God. It is therefore necessary for God to make a move toward fallen man. On this point the scriptures and the Calvinist agree. But Calvinism does not stop there. What the Calvinist means by Total Depravity is Total Inability. That is, the spiritual death inherent in depravity is such that fallen man, apart from a sovereign act of regeneration prior to the act of faith, is totally incapable of hearing the voice of God and or believing the gospel message. Depravity affirms that an unregenerate man may not be as BAD as he can be, but is certainly as BAD OFF as he can be in the grip of spiritual death.

The scriptures clearly teach NO man can believe apart from grace. But Calvinism actually puts a limit on that grace by asserting that an arbitrary and sovereign act of pre-faith regeneration is the ONLY grace option available to God in the work of salvation. In other words, it's ALL or NOTHING for God with no grace options between those two bookends. The biblical view, however, presents to us a drawing, convicting grace that has the ability to enable a lost man to repent and believe the gospel without an arbitrary regeneration prior to faith.

A clear refutation of this theory is found in Genesis Chapter 3. If we are to believe the Reformed definition of depravity, then Adam and Eve were as bad off as they could possibly be after eating the forbidden fruit. The first couple, having died a spiritual death due to disobedience, were able to hear the voice of God, comprehend what God said, conduct an intelligent dialogue with him and comprehend the consequences of their actions. There is nothing quite like biblical truth to destroy and bury Calvinistic speculation!

If (1) regeneration, or the new birth, marks the onset of spiritual life

and sonship, and (2) justification is the act of God declaring the believing sinner to be righteous, then the Calvinist has some serious questions to answer. How much time elapses between life and faith? If the imparting of spiritual life is the beginning of sonship, then there is clearly a period of time during which a sovereign God has unbelieving, unjustified children, whether it's five seconds, five minutes, five hours or five years! But John tells us: "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John3:36). Did you get that?! He that believeth not the Son shall not see life! For ANY intellectually honest student of scripture, that single phrase ALONE should be enough to slam the door on the regeneration-before-faith doctrine, and essentially destroy the entire system of Calvinism!

If Calvinism is correct on depravity, then the apostle John lied when he penned that verse. For John affirms that belief is the prerequisite to life whereas Calvinism teaches that life is requisite for faith. If regeneration precedes justification, then God has sons who remain unforgiven and under his wrath until they believe the gospel. Is this consistent with biblical teaching? If the Calvinist insists that the time period between life and faith is momentary within the context of hearing the gospel, it means that God is depending upon one of his messengers to deliver the gospel before regeneration can take place. So, the 'glory' or 'credit' that the Calvinist has surgically stripped from the sinner must now be attributed to the saint upon whom God depends for gospel delivery.

Unconditional Election

In Calvinism, the logic dictates that since none seek after God, which requires God to regenerate beforehand those that shall believe, it must be that God chose those whom he would regenerate. Since regeneration guarantees consequential faith in the sinner, the spiritual order must be election, regeneration and faith. When John Calvin wrote his Institutes of Religion, he found the logic so compelling that it led him to the concept of Double Predestination. If Unconditional Election is true, then why not Double Predestination? It stands to reason that if God chose to save some and pass over others, and there are only TWO eternal options, then those he passes over for the Heaven option are by default consigned to the Lake of Fire.

But that order CANNOT be the case because regeneration, per Jesus, John and Paul, is an act of God that follows faith. Is the order then election, faith, regeneration? The Calvinist must reject this idea because Total Depravity tells him the sinner cannot believe without first being regenerated. Many students of scripture, however, are

content with this order, but are hard pressed to explain what it is other than the irresistible grace of regeneration, which now follows faith, that brings the depraved sinner to a place where he or she believes the gospel. It is no doubt grace. But if it is grace that the sinner can resist or spurn, then it ceases to be irresistible or sovereign grace.

Moreover, if the order is election, faith and regeneration, how can election alone guarantee faith as an outcome? Could it be then that election was contingent upon what God foreknew the sinner would do? That is exactly how the doctrine is explained by a host of theologians. God knew how the sinner would respond to the Gospel and thus elected him on that basis. Faith and regeneration are exactly what God, in his prescient omniscience, knew would take place upon hearing the gospel. Therefore election is not causative, but nevertheless certain due to foreknowledge.

There you have it: election (based on foreknowledge), faith and regeneration. One will find this order as the tidy formulation of many theological systems. But there is still a problem—election itself. What does it mean, when does it happen, and to what are men elected? The general consensus is that God arbitrarily chose those whom he would save. But does that refer to initial salvation (i.e., justification), the entire salvation package (justification, sanctification and glorification) or something else?

Election signifies a choice on God's part. That much is clear. God makes the choice, not man. Even if one affirms God choosing man is based upon man choosing God, it is still God that ultimately sets the terms for what he chooses to do.

Most discussion about Divine Election over the past several hundred years has been based on a false assumption. The assumption is that God, before the foundation of the world, decided whom he would save, elected them for that purpose and passed over the others. One will find this as the predominant view in most statements of faith. Sounds straightforward enough, right? But here's the problem. Where in the scripture can one find a lost man or woman of whom it is said they were elected BEFORE they were justified? That person does NOT exist in scriptures He or she simply CANNOT be found. Men have been known by God (Jeremiah) and formed in the womb by God (David) before they were born, but not so elected before being regenerated.

The preponderance of biblical evidence demonstrates that election has to do with the unique privileges and service assignments one inherits and receives respectively once a relationship with God is established. One only need consider Saul, Judas, the nation Israel and Jesus himself to see this pattern. The scripture says that all were chosen or elected by God: Saul to be the first king of Israel, Judas to be one of

the Twelve Apostles, Israel to be the Repository of Truth and Progenitor of Messiah, and Jesus to be the Rock of our Salvation. The election of each had NOTHING to do with personal salvation, but rather a privilege they would enjoy and or service they would render. Any study of election that begins with Jesus, the Elect One, can NEVER conclude with ANY of the Five Points of Calvinism left in tact!

Most of the misunderstanding surrounding election is based on a false assumption. Students of theology have debated in vain for centuries over whether men believe because they are elected or are elected because they believe. That argument CANNOT be won because neither of these two viewpoints stands up under biblical scrutiny. Both are wrong because they're based on the false assumption that election has do to with lost men. Election concerns saved men—believers! Both are wrong because they're based on the false assumption that election settled forever (carved in stone) the number of lost men God would save. Election is for believers, not the lost! Election is the sovereign act of God whereby he chooses, according to his own will and for his own purposes, to bestow upon believers the riches of Christ with all the privileges inherent therein, and to equip them with the spiritual gifts necessary to perform the service to which he calls them. If you search the scriptures, allowing each reference to election to be understood in its context, you will find every reference to be consistent with this statement.

The true biblical order is faith, regeneration and election. Once you discard all the false assumptions associated with the traditional definitions of election, the ideas of conditional or unconditional election become irrelevant. It no longer matters when you understand the proper biblical view. Calvinism alleges that only the doctrine of Unconditional Election gives all the glory to God in the matter of salvation, and excludes man altogether as a contributor to his salvation. The problem with Unconditional Election, however, is that it misrepresents God and his truth. Therefore it gives him NO glory whatsoever!

Limited Atonement

The doctrine of Limited Atonement affirms that Christ died for the sins of the elect alone. His vicarious death on their behalf guarantees their salvation. It is impossible that Christ should suffer and die for a sinner and that sinner NOT be saved. If Christ died for all, and all are not saved, then God has failed in his effort to save them. His purpose has been thwarted. Since no purpose of God has ever failed to achieve its goal, then the death of Christ was strictly for the purpose of saving the elect. All of them shall be saved.

The doctrine of Limited Atonement (or Particular Redemption) is a logical extension of Unconditional Election. If God predetermined by sovereign choice those that would be saved, passing over the rest in the process, why suffer and die for the rest? One might call this an economy of effort on God's part. Why not secure the salvation of the elect and atone for their sins alone? Why 'waste' the blood of Christ on the non-elect? If Christ died for all, and all for whom Christ died will surely be saved, then the whole human race would be saved. The fact that many die lost is evidence that Christ died only for that 'Particular' group known as the elect. Limited Atonement rises or falls with Unconditional Election. Either both are true or both are false.

Limited Atonement is easy to embrace logically once you subscribe to Unconditional Election. But it does have its problems. The first is the OT figures and types that picture atonement as all-inclusive of a group. When Adam and Eve left the Garden clothed in skins that God made for them, God had clothed the entire human race. Granted there were only two individuals at the time, but it is nonetheless an accurate statement. When Israel observed its Day of Atonement, the blood sacrifice was made on behalf of the entire nation. Yet we know that many within the elect nation, for whom atonement was made, died lost without ever establishing a relationship with God. When the Lord sent serpents among his people to chasten them for murmuring, the Lord instructed Moses to erect a brass serpent as a "Look and Live" cure for all who had been bitten by the fiery serpents. While the cure was provided for all the snakebite victims, not all that were bitten appropriated the cure, and thus died as a consequence. For ANY intellectually honest Bible student, the OT story of the serpent in the wilderness and our Lord's instructive reference to it in John 3:14-15 should be sufficient to bury the doctrine of Limited Atonement.

The second is the plethora of scriptures that state clearly the all-inclusive nature of the atonement. Isaiah stated that all men like sheep had gone astray, and that the Lord had laid upon the Suffering Servant the iniquity of them all (Isaiah 53:6). You would be amazed at the gimmicks used by Calvinists to limit the "all" in this verse to the so-called elect. Paul made it clear that the living God is the Savior of all men, especially they that believe (1 Timothy 4:10). John said Christ was the propitiation for our (believers) sins and as well as for the sins of the whole world—those persisting in unbelief (1 John 2:2). Paul affirmed that God will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

In John 12:46-47, Jesus said: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." Jesus used the word

“world” three times in these two verses. It cannot mean the "world of the elect" simply because Jesus included in that world every soul that hears His words and refuses to believe! In other words, the "world" as defined by Jesus consists of the elect and non-elect alike. The elect are those who believe; the non-elect are those who persist in unbelief. Jesus declared that He came to save them all, and that all were the objects of His love! These two verses alone, if properly understood in their context by the intellectually honest student of scripture, completely destroy the entire Calvinistic system!

The third is the Gospel and the preaching thereof. Paul penned for the church at Corinth the specific content of the gospel. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day. Christ’s death on the cross is the focal point of the gospel. The ‘good news’ for any sinner is to hear that God in Christ has done something about his sins. If there is a segment of humanity (the non-elect) for whom Jesus did NOT die, then it follows that nothing has been done about their sins. There is therefore NO gospel for them. One cannot be intellectually honest and deny this fact! God CANNOT save ANY man for whom Jesus did not die!

In order for the Calvinist to skirt this issue, he must redefine the gospel. It’s probably more accurate to say that he cuts out the provision part and leaves only the appropriation part. The gospel has two distinct elements. The first is the provision for our sins in the atonement. The second is the appropriation by faith of the benefit of the blood of Christ by the one for whom Christ died. Part one = provision; part two = appropriation. Again, no one who is intellectually honest can deny the two-pronged gospel message. But the Calvinist is NOT given to such honesty. He reduces the gospel to a single prong, which is “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). The Calvinist will go so far as to call this the ‘authentic’ gospel to sound credible (e.g., Al Mohler, Southern Seminary). Because the Calvinist has signed on to Limited Atonement, he has also signed on to a half-gospel message. Admonishing lost men that they can be saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is the truth. But it's not the WHOLE truth, it’s NOT the full gospel. It’s HALF a gospel; a deficient gospel!

It should be so apparent by now why it is the Calvinist is more comfortable with an appropriation-only gospel message. If we assume for the sake of argument that Limited Atonement is true, then NO Calvinist can look a sinner in the eye and say: “Christ died for your sins!” Nor can the five-point preacher look out over a congregation and proclaim: “Christ died for YOUR sins!” He can’t affirm it because he has no way of knowing whether or not he’s speaking with or addressing the elect. If he tells a non-elect sinner that Christ died for

his sins, he has lied to the sinner and misrepresented God. Claiming ignorance as to who the elect are does NOT excuse the Calvinist from fraudulence. The solution to this dilemma is to give the sinner a halfgospel message. That's the safe way out. Unfortunately, the closest the Calvinist can come to the 'Provision' side of the gospel is: "Christ [may have] died for your sins!" That, my friend, is a concept foreign to scripture!

Lewis Sperry Chafer was the Founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. He might also be considered the Father of Four Point Calvinism. Dr. Chafer faced the same struggle described above: How can a Five Point Calvinist preach the full gospel with good conscience? Chafer found himself wrestling with the gospel deficiency of Five Point Calvinism. In other words, he found the full-blown gospel and full-blown Calvinism to be incompatible and mutually exclusive! He was correct!

His solution was to abandon Limited Atonement. Of course, the preponderance of biblical evidence made this rather easy to do. If you take time to read the atonement section of Chafer's Systematic Theology, you will find all of the reasons why he opted for an all-inclusive atonement with universal application rather than the theory of Particular Redemption. The Four Point Calvinism of Chafer freed up his conscience enough to know that he would NOT be sending intellectually dishonest, half-gospel seminary graduates into the pulpits of the land (which is exactly what Dr. Al Mohler of Southern Seminary is doing year in, year out). Dr. Chafer continued to defend the other Four Points, which makes no sense to me. But at least he and his student preacher boys had a biblical gospel consisting of the requisite 'Provision' and 'Appropriation' elements. It's a spiritual travesty that the flagship Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention has become a major breeding ground for half-gospel preachers!

Another practical issue for the doctrine of Limited Atonement is the impossibility of any objective assurance of salvation. If Christ did NOT die for all, then how can anyone know for certain that Christ died for them? The most ardent supporters of Limited Atonement, as a matter of intellectual honesty, must admit to this! The Calvinist literally jumps through linguistic hoops and looks for perceived loopholes in the biblical text in order to prove that the atonement is limited in its scope. Of course, there is no proof there. But the Calvinist wrests and twists the scripture anyway to manufacture what he thinks is proof.

In the final analysis, the survival of Reformed Theology (Calvinism) depends entirely upon its ability to explain away every biblical reference to a universal atonement. It's no more complicated than that. So if you happen to converse with a Calvinist about his doctrine, just ask him one simple question: "Do you believe Jesus died for YOUR sins?" When he answers in the affirmative, ask him (1) to cite

one objective biblical reference to substantiate his belief, and (2) to explain how that particular scripture applies to HIM but not to ALL. The bottom line: If Jesus did not die for ALL, no man can have ANY ASSURANCE Jesus died for HIM! If he has a moment of intellectual honesty and cedes the point, ask him: “Why are you a Calvinist in the first place?”

Do you think the Five Point Calvinist is aware that he is destroying any objective proof whatsoever for his own redemption? If he affirms there is NO objective basis in truth for an all-inclusive atonement, he's also affirming there is NO objective basis for his own salvation. How would he know with any certitude that Jesus’ blood had atoned for HIS sins? Would he cite the fact that he has believed on the Lord Jesus as the evidence, or claim an inward peace as proof? So what! Big deal! It is impossible to appropriate what God did not provide. Therefore an alleged act of appropriation CANNOT serve as the evidence of provision. The Calvinist can believe on the Lord Jesus as many times as he wishes and still end up in the Lake of Fire IF the blood of Jesus did not atone for his sins! It should be obvious at this point that for any Calvinist to argue against a universal, all-inclusive atonement is a fool's errand!

Irresistible Grace

The doctrine of Irresistible Grace affirms that the call of God for the sinner to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is irresistible, always successful. The doctrine of Irresistible Grace is a logical extension of Total Depravity and Total Inability. Since God imparts spiritual life to the depraved sinner, essentially making him a son so he CAN believe, the act of regeneration makes the faith response certain. God does not manipulate the will or force faith to take place. Regeneration simply makes the sinner agreeable to the truth, and makes a free response on the part of the sinner inevitable. Thus grace is Irresistible, making for an Effectual Call.

In my mind, this point is probably the weakest of the five. If God regenerates sinners and makes them sons in response to faith in the Lord Jesus, as the scriptures unequivocally affirm, the argument for irresistibility is lost. There are very few biblical truths with more ironclad attestation than faith in Jesus being requisite for spiritual life. As we have said previously and as most Calvinists will admit, the Five Points stand or fall together. They all fall together here. Some of the saddest examples of the deceitful handling of scripture can be found in the writings of Calvinists as they seek to inject the regeneration-before-faith error into John Chapter 3.

Another false assumption of Calvinism with regard to Irresistible

Grace is the artificial distinction between a General Call and an Effectual Call. The general call is that which goes out to all men without regard for their status as elect or non-elect. The general call is made effectual in the elect by a pre-faith regeneration that has the inevitable exercise of faith as its result. So God opts to regenerate his elect so they can hear and respond to the gospel call while that same call falls upon the unresponsive ears of the non-elect. But here's the problem! There is no such thing in scripture as a lost elect man. The elect are in Christ, the Elect One. What makes the gospel call effectual is the fact it's mixed with faith in those who choose to hear it. The mixture of the gospel and faith brings the new birth (regeneration), which in turn results in election, whereby God chooses the believer in Christ to share his riches and to serve him according to the spiritual gifts with which he equips him.

But the Calvinist asks: “From whence does faith come?” He cites Ephesians 2:8-9, and reminds us that faith is the gift of God. Faith is certainly impossible without the operation of grace. But the “gift” of God in those verses is salvation, not faith. It (salvation) is the gift of God. This text is another example of Calvinist dishonesty. But he feels he must do everything in his exegetical power to disassociate a lost man from faith. Else it is a work on the part of the man. The Calvinist argument juxtaposes monergism (God is the only one who works in bringing salvation) over against synergism (God and man both work to bring about salvation), and insists that monergism alone is biblical. The reasoning is that if regeneration is contingent upon faith, then man has worked to bring it about, and God does not get all the glory.

The problem with this erroneous logic, which continues to be propagated by Calvinist icons, is that faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). The Bible teaches the stronger a man is in faith, the more God is glorified (Romans 4:20). Biblical faith speaks of man casting himself upon the mercy of God with an awareness of his total and absolute inability to contribute one iota to his salvation. In passages such as Romans 4:5, 16, the apostle Paul paints a stark contrast between faith and works, and excludes faith from the works category altogether. Paul taught it was faith that enabled grace to make the promise sure to all the seed (i.e., the elect). Reformed theologians who label as synergists and semi-Pelagians those who defend the biblical position of faith before regeneration have absolutely no foundation upon which to stand!

The Calvinist again insists that it is God who ‘grants repentance’ to lost men. He cites 2 Timothy 2:25 as a proof for this argument. I have no problem with this argument on its face. The ability to repent and believe the Gospel is rooted in God’s grace, without which no man can believe and be saved (Acts 18:27). But to offer this passage as proof

that God arbitrarily decides to whom he will give repentance does damage to the context. The fact is God has granted repentance to every Gentile on the planet on the basis of Christ's all-inclusive death and resurrection (Acts 11:18). But the granting of repentance (or the ability to repent) NEVER guarantees a faith response.

The context of 2 Timothy 2:25 has to do with those who "oppose themselves". The fact is no sinner opposes himself until he hears the truth of the gospel and rejects it. Those to whom Paul refers are lost men to whom God granted repentance, but who chose rather to "hold [suppress] the truth in unrighteousness" and were therefore given over by God to reprobate minds (Romans 1:18-28). The issue in the context is the manner in which the pastor should handle such folks (i.e., "in meekness instructing" them). Paul is referring to those who were exposed to Gospel truth, refused to acknowledge it, and were therefore abandoned to and entrenched in spiritual blindness and satanic bondage as a result. The issue is not whether God gives repentance on an arbitrary basis to rank-and-file sinners, but whether God would be pleased to give the ability to repent a second time (or third, fourth or seventy times seven) through the God-like and tender approach of His representative—the man of God. This is yet another example of Calvinism disregarding a context in order to manufacture a proof text.

Perseverance of the Saints

The doctrine of Perseverance affirms that those whom God elects, regenerates, justifies and predestines will continue to persist and grow in godliness. Perseverance is the sin qua non of true regeneration. A failure to persevere in the Christian walk is evidence that regeneration never really happened in the first place.

There are two major problems with perseverance from a biblical perspective. The first is the lack of perseverance in people we know were genuinely saved (Lot, Samson, Ananias, Sapphira et al). Included within this group are: (1) those who will be saved "so as by fire" after their wood, hay and stubble burns up at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15), and (2) those who died prematurely under chastening for partaking "unworthily" of the Lord's Supper (11:29-32).

The second is the failure to maintain the biblical distinction between justification and discipleship. When a man or woman believes through grace, he or she is born again, justified by faith. As a babe in Christ, the process of spiritual growth begins. This is the purview of discipleship. The fact so many believers never become "skillful in the word of righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13) and thus remain babes in Christ is evidence that preservation rather than perseverance is the

proper biblical view. Many churches do a decent job at evangelizing sinners with a VIEW TO faith but fail miserably in discipling them AFTER they believe. Genuine believers, having been justified by faith, can remain babes, drift into carnality and fail to bear spiritual fruit because no one mentored them in the faith. This can happen for a number of reasons.

If Calvinism had affirmed the PRESERVATION of the saints, that would have been consistent with truth. But the doctrine of perseverance is a different breed of doctrine. The doctrine of preservation puts the onus on God to save to the uttermost those who come to him through his Son Jesus. Its focus is upon GOD'S ability to KEEP his own. Contrariwise, the doctrine of perseverance places the onus on the professor of faith to endure or persist in the Christian walk until of end of life. Its focus is upon MAN'S ability to KEEP himself. Isn't it ironic that a system that places so much emphasis on God getting all the glory for the salvation of man makes man's ability to persevere the arbiter of true salvation?

The doctrine of perseverance is counter to assurance. The fact is one who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ is saved. He or she is predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. The GOAL of our predestination (conformity to Christ's image) is NOT contingent upon perseverance. If it is, then NO believer can have ANY assurance of their salvation until they die and hear God say: "Welcome home! You persevered!"

The doctrine of perseverance is salvation by works. The Calvinist will argue until he is blue in the face that the perseverance of any saint is EVIDENCE of salvation and NEVER its CAUSE! He will insist that the issue is NOT the LOSS of salvation but whether a PROFESSOR was ever a POSSESSOR. I get it...and the Bible does indeed teach that there can be Judas-like folk, tares among the wheat and false brethren. But perseverance of the saints implies that we're dealing with actual saints. So the argument is vacuous on its face.

The fact is not every believer perseveres until the end. In addition to Lot, Ananias and Sapphira we have the prophet Jonah. The last glimpse we have of this man of God is overlooking a repentant city and sulking in bitterness over those he felt were undeserving of mercy. In 1 Corinthians, we find a church full of saved folk who were living as mere carnal men, as if they had never been born again. Paul said some would be saved so as by fire with only wood, hay and stubble to show for their efforts. Others had died prematurely for their profane treatment of the Lord's Supper, but were deemed to be asleep in Christ notwithstanding their lack of perseverance.

Here are a few questions for the Calvinist. How much perseverance is required to qualify as perseverance? Is it a matter of the DEGREE of

godliness or its DURATION? We know it cannot be sinless perfection. Yet if there is such a thing as a line beyond which one is considered to have failed to persevere, what is that line? Does anyone but God know what that is? Is it a particular sin (adultery, drugs, divorce) or an aggregate of sins? Is it a denial of Christ? If that is the case, please explain Paul's statement: "*If we deny him, yet he abideth faithful. He cannot deny himself*" (2 Timothy 2:13). Does perseverance mean that every GENUINE saint dies in fellowship with Christ?

The Calvinistic doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints is nothing more than old school Catholicism dressed up in orthodox language. It is salvation by works, pure and simple. It's a sow doused with theological perfume.

My Personal Experience with Calvinism

There is an infection sweeping churches today, especially Southern Baptist Churches, regarding the system of Calvinism and Reformed Theology. The virulent impact of this doctrine has been exacerbated by notable advocates such as Albert Mohler, John MacArthur and John Piper. These well-meaning men have wielded tremendous destructive influence over the minds and ministries of young preachers.

There is no desire on my part to disparage these men. My intent is to share my personal experience with Calvinism, how the Lord delivered me from its clutches and what I believe to be its fundamental flaw. It is my humble opinion that one of the evidences of genuine revival, if God should grant it to his churches, will be sweeping repentance by Calvinist pastors and professors for propagating this false doctrine and infecting their congregations and classrooms.

I've been a Five-Point Calvinist twice in my life. After the Lord called me to preach in 1971, I began my studies at Miami Bible College (Miami, FL) in the fall of that year. At age 23, like most Baptists, I knew little about theological or doctrinal issues. The professorial staff, however, was almost entirely Calvinist. Little by little I got exposed to election, predestination and the Five Points, and wondered why I had never heard this from my pastors.

I spent dozens of hours in the library pouring through commentaries on Romans, Ephesians and other books looking for consistent interpretations of Romans 8:28-30, Ephesians 1:4 and other "proof text" passages. Like all novices in Calvinistic thought, I was in search of something confirmatory to bolster this newfound truth that no one had heretofore bothered to teach me. As I came to realize later, NONE

of these proof text passages was grounded in CONTEXTUAL exegesis or exposition. It was mostly regurgitation of conventional Calvinist thought. Proof texts are seldom used for their exegetical-expository value. Yet Calvinist theory is built almost entirely upon the proof text method that fails to account for the context of the verses it cites.

Well, it wasn't long before I became a 'Predestination' zealot. I was involved with our church youth, and exposed my training union class one Sunday evening to the doctrine of Election. One of the teens told her parents, her parents told the pastor, and the pastor called me into his study for a conference. Out of respect for him, I cooled my jets on teaching Calvinism. I believed I was right, the pastor was wrong. But I also knew my time would come to articulate freely the glories of Calvinism from a pulpit of my own.

In the summer of 1973, I went to Alaska for three weeks to help a missionary establish a youth camp. A few months before making the trip, I remember being on my knees in prayer at our apartment. The Lord had called me to preach and I had come to realize there might be negative consequences to preaching Calvinism in the churches I would pastor. I told the Lord no matter the consequences I would preach unapologetically 'the whole counsel of God' (i.e., Calvinism) without regard for favorable-unfavorable consequences. But I added: "Lord, if Calvinism is NOT the truth, and there is more light I need to see, PLEASE reveal that light to me BEFORE I embark upon my first pastorate!"

A few months later I was in Alaska with Baptist missionary Lindsey Williams. The Lord woke me up about 4am one morning with this scripture flashing in my mind like a neon sign: "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth*" (Romans 8:33). At that moment, I knew the Lord was answering my prayer for more light. In that scripture, the Lord revealed to me this truth: ALL OF HIS ELECT ARE JUSTIFIED! In other words, there are NO lost elect men yet to be justified. Since lost, unjustified men ARE chargeable, NO lost man can be among the elect. God's elect are ALL justified; they are ALL chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:4).

The Calvinist tries to make much of the phrase "before the foundation of the world" in Ephesians 1:4 as proof that election took place before time began. In like manner, Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). But in what sense was he slain? He was slain by the Father in the eternal sense as to his redemptive purpose. But Jesus was actually slain in the temporal sense outside the walls of Jerusalem circa 33 A.D.

God's eternal purpose of election in Christ was to save to the uttermost those who came to the Father through his Son. In the eternal sense, based on that eternal purpose, God first elected Christ to

serve as the Redeemer of lost men and then elected believers 'in Christ' before the foundation of the world to serve him as well. In the temporal sense, God actually elected them when they believed. Failure to compare scripture with scripture and distinguish between the eternal and the temporal will cause a Calvinist to break his theological neck.

Election is IN CHRIST and therefore applies to NO ONE who is OUTSIDE of Christ. The Calvinist places himself in the untenable position of having to explain how those who were IN Christ before the foundation of the world got themselves OUT of Christ.

The light from Romans 8:33 laid the groundwork for my deliverance from Calvinism. After returning from Alaska, I spent dozens of hours going back over all the ‘proof text’ passages I was using to defend Calvinism, interpreting them in context exegetically rather than eisegetically. God granted more light. When Christ is at the center of one’s election doctrine as THE ELECT of God (1 Peter 2:6, 9), he or she will NEVER arrive at Calvinism. Peter understood that a 'chosen generation' of believers derived its 'elect' status from the Elected One. One of the flaws of Calvinism is failure to put Christ at the center of election!

In the mid-1990's, I reverted back to Five Point Calvinism for a time, probably because of its irresistible and toxic logic. As a result of my doctrinal backsliding, the Spirit of God gave additional light and clarity on the fundamental errors of Calvinistic thought, which made me a better contextual expositor and motivated me to write this book.

Biblical election has nothing to do with God choosing lost men with a view to justifying them. It has to do with God choosing the justified (1) to serve him according to the gifts-calling he bestows upon them, and (2) to be recipients of the spiritual-eternal benefits to which God entitled them by virtue of their union with Christ, the Elect One. The truths that the Father 'elected' Jesus to be the chief cornerstone of our redemption (1 Peter 2:6) and that Jesus 'elected' Judas to be one of the Twelve (John 6:70) are in harmony with and confirm the view that election is a matter of service and privilege.

Years ago I discovered some websites that provided guidelines to Calvinist pastors on how to migrate their churches into Calvinism over a two-year period. The scripture tells us that the wisdom that is from above is peaceable and easy to be entreated (James 3:17). But there is nothing peaceful, or easy to be entreated, about Calvinism for those raised on that old-time religion—the love of Jesus for ALL men in his death on Calvary! Therefore a Calvinistic pastor MUST have a strategy to expose his non- Calvinistic church to Calvinist thought in a scheming, calculating way. It's almost cult-like, and certainly deceptive!

In my mind, the moment a preacher embraces the doctrine of Particular Redemption, he has abandoned the true Gospel for a 'Half-Gospel' message. I would encourage readers to review my analysis of Limited Atonement in ‘An Overview of Calvinism’. That section deals with many of the flaws in Calvinistic thought, especially Limited Atonement.

The fundamental problem with Calvinism is the Gospel, which has two distinct elements. The first is the PROVISION-" *Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures*" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The second is the APPROPRIATION-"*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:31). Calvinism virtually strips the Gospel of its provisional element. For the doctrine of Limited Atonement denies to EVERY sinner ANY objective assurance that Christ died for his or her sins!

The Calvinist can tell a lost person that if they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be saved. True enough! But if that lost person is NOT one of the elect—a possibility the Calvinist MUST acknowledge—and Christ did NOT die for them and atone for their sins, then the Calvinist becomes a LIAR! For God cannot and will not save ANY sinner for whom Christ did NOT die.

The Calvinist preacher is now in a position where he MUST admit that Christ may not have died for HIS OWN sins since he has eviscerated the scriptures of all OBJECTIVE evidence of a universal, all-inclusive atonement. That means the ONLY evidence he has is a SUBJECTIVE experience he had when he allegedly believed. Understand this! It is impossible for a man to appropriate what God has not provided. Thus an alleged act of appropriation CANNOT serve as the evidence of provision. The Calvinist, or anyone else for that matter, can believe on the Lord Jesus as many times as he wishes and still end up in the Lake of Fire IF the blood of Jesus did not atone for his sins!

The Calvinist argues that it’s not up to him to determine who the elect are, but to preach the Gospel and let God give the results. But what is the Gospel he preaches? It is a Half-Gospel, a Deficient Gospel! If he preaches a message that consists of an appeal to faith (appropriation) without equal certitude regarding the death of Christ as the atonement for ALL (provision), he is preaching half the truth. That is, he is NOT preaching the whole counsel of God. If he truly believes in the limited scope of Christ’s death and his restricted love for the 'elect' only, then any faith appeal made to the ‘non-elect’ based on the love of Christ is purely disingenuous. In the system of Calvinism, God has no intent to save the non-elect. For the Calvinist to represent him otherwise is FRAUDULENT!

In order for a preacher to be a Calvinist in the pulpit, he MUST resort to intellectual dishonesty! For if he preaches the love of God for ALL

when he believes God provided atonement for only SOME, he is a hypocrite of the first order. And no matter how much God may or may not love the non-elect, the 'Sovereign' God of Calvinism is totally INCAPABLE of saving those for whom Christ did NOT die.

It should be a source of outrage for every Southern Baptist to know that Al Mohler, President of Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY and his Calvinist cohorts are training and sending out thousands of 'Half-Gospel' preachers to fill the pulpits of Convention churches. It is simply impossible to harmonize Divine Favor with a Deficient Gospel!

Many Calvinists claim they arrived at the Five Points by allowing the scriptures to lead them where they would, to simply let them say what they say. These are the responses of INTELLECTUALLY LAZY men, content to embrace a 'proof text' theology without doing the honest work of contextual exegesis/exposition. As we have shown, no student of scripture could possibly arrive at the doctrine of Limited (Particular) Atonement by following the lead of scripture. If one cannot get to limited atonement, the whole system of Calvinism is kaput!

If you're a preacher of Calvinism, be honest enough to preach what you believe. Don't play the hypocrite! Tell the congregation that Jesus may or may not have died for their sins. Tell them that even if they believe, faith in Christ may or may not save them from their sins depending on whether they're one of the elect. While you're being honest, tell them that NO one, including YOU, can be certain that Christ died for their sins since you've obliterated ALL objective biblical evidence to support that assertion. If one cannot have certainty regarding atonement for sins, neither can one have any assurance of salvation in this life!

These are the practical implications of the Gospel and the Calvinism that assaults it. For this reason, no Calvinist belongs in a Baptist pulpit. He should embrace a new denominational tag consistent with the philosophical speculations of Calvinism. How about "The Half-Gospel Baptist Convention"?

There is, however, a better alternative for one who has wandered into the morass of Calvinism. That option is to jettison the system and embrace, or perhaps re-embrace, the true Gospel of the grace of God and his all-encompassing love for sinners. It is my prayer that this personal testimony and analysis will provide the motivation for Calvinists to abandon the system and for the uninfected to avoid it.\

Calvinism: A Mental Disorder

A mental disorder allegation with regard to Reformed Theology seems like an extreme assessment of the philosophical system called

Calvinism. But make no mistake! Calvinism is far more philosophical than it is theological. It has its roots in speculation rather than revelation. It is therefore entirely proper to brand Calvinism as a system of philosophical speculation.

This article will seek to illustrate and establish that allegation as we take an imaginary trip through the scriptures with two men - one a Calvinist and the other a Biblicist. The Calvinist is a staunch five-pointer and knows all the arguments for his positions. The Biblicist is a zero-pointer and knows why he rejects all five points of Calvinism. At various stops along their journey, they engage in brief dialogue before moving along to the next text. So off they go.

First stop: Genesis 4:3-16. The Biblicist points out that God, as he reasoned with Cain, was sincere in his offer of acceptance IF Cain would but do the right thing, bring the prescribed sacrifice, which Abel his brother had brought. But our Calvinist argues that the reason why Cain rejected God's offer is because God had not chosen Cain, did not regenerate him so he could hear God's voice. As a result, Cain heard only the sounds of God's words, not the words themselves. Cain therefore remained spiritually dead and fulfilled God's purpose in NOT electing him. I've actually heard Calvinists make this ludicrous argument.

Our Biblicist cautions that such an analysis puts the sincerity of God in doubt, as if God was toying with Cain with no intention of accepting him. The Calvinist assures the Biblicist that there is no contradiction, that Cain COULD have responded if he WOULD have, that God WOULD have accepted him if he HAD done well. But the Biblicist contends, and correctly so, that if God MUST regenerate a man BEFORE he can believe, and God chooses NOT to regenerate that man, then all of the promises God makes to sinners like Cain contingent upon faith and obedience are thus meaningless and portray God as disingenuous. But the Calvinist maintains they're dealing with the 'deep things' of God - no contradiction.

Second stop: Isaiah 53:6. Here the Biblicist points out the “all” that begins the verse and the “all” that ends it MUST be the same group of sinners. The Calvinist concurs, but then insists that the “all's” of Isaiah 53:6 MUST be a reference to the elect since it is impossible that the Lord could lay the iniquity of any man upon Christ and that man not be saved. It's the old “God cannot make the sinner pay for what Christ paid” argument. In other words, God would NEVER allow his Son to suffer for sins and then make the sinner suffer for them the second time. The late and well-known Calvinist Harold Camping used to say that any God that would require sins be paid for twice is a monster! The Biblicist questions whether the CONTEXT could allow for such a meaning since the prophet's primary target audience was the nation of

Israel, some of whom were saved, many of whom died in unbelief. The Calvinist thinks his philosophical argument trumps the context.

Third stop: John 3:16. Here the Biblicist points out the obvious—that the world is loved by God and drove him to give his only begotten Son for their salvation. He adds furthermore if the plain sense of scripture makes good sense, we should seek no other sense, lest we turn the text into nonsense. But our Calvinist sticks with his “no suffering twice” argument, insisting that if the “world” of John 3:16 meant all of humanity, then all humanity would be saved. Again, the Biblicist cites the CONTEXT as an arbiter, reasoning that Jesus would have expressed (1) a mindset consistent with OT mentions of “world” that included, in almost every case, ALL of humanity, and (2) a genuine desire for Nicodemus to “get it” in terms of understanding the new birth, the question that triggered this whole line of thought on Jesus' part. For the Calvinist, the philosophical once again trumps the contextual. The “world” of John 3:16, in his mind, must mean “the world of the elect.” The Calvinist knows that if “world” means “all of humanity, both Jew and Gentile”, a meaning Nicodemus certainly derived from Jesus' words, his whole system of Calvinism bites the proverbial dust.

Four additional stops: 2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; 4:10; Hebrews 2:9. These two men could have made many more stops in their journey. But these classic texts represent what many other texts affirm, that (1) Christ died for all who died spiritually in Adam, (2) God would have ALL men to be saved and gave himself a ransom for ALL, (3) Jesus is the Saviour of ALL men, especially believers, and (4) Jesus tasted death for EVERY man. As the Biblicist graciously presents a preponderance of evidence for an all-inclusive atonement, the Calvinist, with his philosophical arguments for a limited atonement, continues to maintain that “all men” cannot mean all men, that “every man” cannot mean every man, and that “the world” cannot mean the whole world.

At the end of the journey, the Calvinist believes he has weathered the storm, that his rational system of philosophical thought has withstood the test, notwithstanding his bastardization of nearly every text and context along the way. With his philosophical penknife, the Calvinist has eviscerated the Gospel. The Biblicist reminds him that by stripping the Word of God of ANY and EVERY objective reference to a Universal Atonement, he has essentially destroyed any biblical assurance whatsoever that Jesus died for HIS OWN SINS. All that remains then is a subjective experience, a profession of faith, which may have indeed been genuine, resulting in the new birth. He further admonishes the Calvinist that he is dangerously close to "denying the Lord who bought him" (2 Peter 2:1).

What then shall we conclude about a man who believes the Gospel, trusts Christ based on the persuasion that Jesus died for HIS sins, is genuinely born again, and down the spiritual road embraces a system of philosophical thought in which he MUST now argue that Jesus did NOT die for ALL, and therefore may or may not have died for HIM because he has managed to explain away ANY objective biblical evidence to support universal atonement? ANY man who would argue that Jesus did NOT die for all of humanity MUST also acknowledge that the death of Christ may not have included him. THAT man suffers from a mental disorder, which is further complicated by the purposeful bastardization of biblical contexts because he MUST keep his Calvinism alive at all costs. Make no mistake! The Calvinistic argument for Limited Atonement is philosophical, NOT theological. The Calvinist MUST impose upon biblical contexts his philosophical arguments in order to destroy the theological basis for a Universal Atonement.

Before they part company, the Biblicist reminds his Calvinist friend that the Gospel has both a PROVISION element ("Christ died for our sins"—1 Corinthians 15:3-4) and an APPROPRIATION element ("Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved"-Acts 16:31). He also points out that the Lake of fire, even though it entails unimaginable suffering for lost sinners, has absolutely NO propitiatory value or payment value whatsoever Godward. Christ suffered and paid for our sins in full. God accepted that payment as evidenced in the Resurrection. Men go to hell, not to pay for sins, but because of unbelief that leaves them in their sins to die in their sins. While eternity in the Lake of Fire is a matter of suffering, the sinner will not be paying for his sins. That was a work only God himself could perform on a sinner's behalf, and he did so for ALL men in the Person of his Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Men go to hell because of unbelief, a failure to appropriate by faith the atonement God provided.

The seeds of this mental disorder called Calvinism are typically planted in the mind of a believer, one who became a Christian by believing the "whosoever will" gospel, when he hears or reads for the first time a Calvinist make these philosophical arguments. At first blush, they come across as SO logical. He says to himself, "How come I never heard this stuff before?" He may conclude that his previous pastors were 'unlearned' or 'ignorant' for withholding such glorious 'insights' from him, or for just not 'getting it'. He begins to immerse himself in the writings of other Calvinists (Puritans, Spurgeon, Boettner, Pink, MacArthur, Sproul et al) to constantly reinforce his new thinking. "How can so many good men be wrong about this stuff?" he asks himself. Over time he masters the 'proof-texts' in an effort to defend his new-found philosophical system. Having become a

champion of 'sovereignty' (or so he thinks), he morphs into a zealot, arguing against the same Universal Atonement he once believed to the saving of his soul. He is now proudly a 'Grace Man', who has bastardized every biblical context providing objective evidence for his own redemption.

The mental disorder of Calvinism is further complicated in the matter of evangelism. Now that he has embraced the doctrine of Particular Redemption, he's armed with only half the Gospel. He cannot tell ANY lost man the Good News that Christ died for his sins UNLESS he is willing to play the hypocrite. If he does not believe Jesus died for ALL, how can he with good conscience assure ANY lost man of that truth? In other words, how is it possible to evangelize ANY lost man with the Good News that Jesus died for his sins when Particular Redemption puts the whole issue in doubt? It is NOT possible! The only REAL evangelism done in this world is by those who believe Jesus died for ALL. Where salvation from sin is concerned, there is NO Good News to ANY man for whom Christ did not die and for whom God made NO atonement in the death of his Son.

One of the first arguments a Calvinist adopts is that his view of Particular Redemption in no way affects evangelism. It goes like this: "I don't know who the elect are. My job is to share the Gospel, let God handle the results and save his elect!" But this lame attempt to justify defective thinking once again begs the question: "What Gospel is the Calvinist sharing?" If he's telling a lost man Jesus loves him and died for his sins, then why is he a Calvinist in the first place? He's a hypocrite.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is a perfect example of this mental disorder. In a sermon entitled “Election No Discouragement To Seeking Souls”, Spurgeon made this statement: “Furthermore, if we understand the gospel at all, the gospel lies in a nutshell. It is this: ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved'...This promise is the gospel” (Spurgeon’s Sermons, Vol. 8, p. 233). The apostle Paul understood the gospel, and would have this to say to Spurgeon: “That promise, brother Charles, is NOT the Gospel. It's a half-Gospel. The Gospel is the promise (offer) of forgiveness and life eternal based upon the Good News that Christ provided an atonement for sins!” Because Spurgeon held the false doctrine of a Limited Atonement, it was impossible for him to declare the Gospel Paul preached. He was forced, like all Calvinists are, to redefine the Gospel (as promise minus provision) because of the limited scope he placed upon the death of Christ. The Calvinist who thinks he's preaching the Gospel by accentuating the promise at the expense of the provision is certifiably delusional.

In the same message, Spurgeon declared: “If any man who ever lived,

or ever shall live, believes in Jesus Christ, he hath eternal life. Election or no election, if you are resting upon the rock of ages, you are saved. If you, as a guilty sinner, take the righteousness of Christ—if, all black and foul and filthy, you come to wash in the fountain filled with blood—sovereignty or no sovereignty, rest assured of this, that you are redeemed from the wrath to come" (Ibid, p. 233). His remarks may sound commendable, but they are grossly hypocritical and false. God CANNOT redeem ANY sinner for whom Christ did not die. God CANNOT save him no matter how much he believes! Spurgeon's theology of Particular Redemption taught him there was neither effectual grace nor a fountain filled with blood for those excluded from the atonement. Spurgeon's words are indicative of his intellectual dishonesty, as well as that of every Calvinist, in this area. Moreover, they enable us to understand that the great success of Spurgeon's ministry can be largely attributed to his inconsistencies with the tenets of Calvinism rather than his embrace of them.

Calvinism's Primary Argument Refuted

The system of Calvinism hinges on a single philosophical argument. It concerns the death of Christ and those for whom Jesus died. It asserts that if Jesus suffered and died for the sins of ALL men, then there remains NO LEGAL BASIS upon which God can send a man to the Lake of Fire to suffer for sins the second time. We might call it the 'no double jeopardy' argument. In other words, it's impossible that both Christ and the sinner could be placed in jeopardy for the same sins. From a purely logical and forensic viewpoint, the argument makes perfect sense. It's one of the allures of Calvinism. But without this little bit of philosophical logic, Calvinism doesn't have a leg to stand on where the gospel is concerned.

The problem with the 'no legal basis' argument is it stems from human rationalism rather than divine revelation. The number one arbiter of any theological system is the truth of God's Word. No matter how appealing an argument may be to our sense of logic, it MUST pass biblical muster before we can embrace it. When the Calvinist buys into the 'no double jeopardy' argument, it becomes his template, his hermeneutic, for interpreting the many biblical passages where scripture uses phrases like "all men" and "whole world" to describe the scope of Christ's vicarious death. The result is the bastardization of biblical contexts by the imposition of humanistic logic.

The proper biblical hermeneutic is to examine every text of scripture in its CONTEXT. Through a process of comparing scripture with

scripture, look for consistent patterns that reflect what the mind of God is and draw valid theological conclusions based on the preponderance of contextual truth. For the most part, Calvinists are good at doing this, except for imposition of the 'no double jeopardy' template upon selected texts. If one studies scripture without this template, without this rationalistic hermeneutic, he or she will find the ring of universality resonating throughout the scriptures. Let's take a walk through scripture using a proper hermeneutic to see whether the 'no double jeopardy' argument of Calvinism squares with biblical truth. Our observational walk begins in Genesis.

Genesis 3:21-"*Unto Adam also and to his wife [Eve] did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them*." At the time the Lord crafted these coats from animal skins, prefiguring both the system of blood sacrifices God would institute for Israel and Christ, the ENTIRE human race consisted of Adam and Eve. In other words, the provision God made for the first couple was universal in scope.

Genesis 4:7-"*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?*" Was God's offer of acceptance to Cain a legitimate one? Of course! Abel had the same offer and complied. If not, God was disingenuous when he reasoned with Cain! Since this offer of acceptance was genuine, upon what LEGAL BASIS could God have accepted Cain if the death of Christ did not include Cain's sins? In Hebrews 11:4, we're told: "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts*." A doing well by faith on Cain's part (proper sacrificial approach) would have given him a righteous standing before God on the SAME LEGAL BASIS upon which Abel obtained it—the death of Christ. The Lord offered Cain the same acceptance and righteousness he granted to Abel, but Cain rejected it. If Cain's sins were not within the scope of Christ's suffering, there was NO LEGAL BASIS upon which the Lord could have made a genuine offer of acceptance.

Leviticus 16:20-22. In this chapter, God gave Israel instructions for the Day of Atonement. It involved (1) a bullock the high priest would offer for his sins and those of his family, and (2) two goats the high priest would offer for the nation, one for sacrifice and one for a scapegoat. As for the scapegoat, the high priest would "lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him ALL the iniquities of the children of Israel, and ALL their transgressions in ALL their sins." The scapegoat that was let go in the wilderness would bear upon him "ALL their iniquities unto a land not inhabited." The Day of Atonement scapegoat was a universal sin bearer that prefigured Christ. Among those atoned for were believers and non-believers alike, true Jews according to the spirit and mere Jews according to the flesh, an election within an election.

Number 21:6-9. The Lord sent “fiery serpents” among the people of Israel in response to murmuring over the manna God provided daily. After many had died, the Lord instructed Moses to raise up a serpent on a pole so that if any man was bitten, he could look upon the serpent and live. Jesus used this analogy in his dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:14). The Lord provided a solution for ALL those who were snake- bitten. While many looked and lived, there is NO evidence to suggest that (1) ALL the snake-bitten for whom God provided a remedy appropriated the cure, (2) EVERY Israelite was snake-bitten, or (3) ANY surrounding nation was affected. This is important because Reformed theologians argue, and falsely so, that because the remedy was provided only for Israel, it proves the atonement was only for the elect. But there is NO biblical evidence to suggest that the remedy God provided for ALL the snake-bitten was appropriated by ALL for whom God provided it.

Isaiah 1:18-“ *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*” In this passage, we are faced with the same predicament posed by Cain. First, was God's offer of cleansing for Israel a genuine offer? If so, upon what LEGAL BASIS could God make this offer of cleansing to the nation if his Son was not going to suffer for the sins of ALL those in Isaiah's target audience?

Isaiah 53:6-“*ALL we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned EVERY ONE to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us ALL.*” Again we hear the ring of universality. The Calvinist is quick to break out the 'no double jeopardy' template, insisting “all” must refer to “all [of the elect]” since it is impossible that Christ should suffer for the non-elect. The problems are: (1) Isaiah has a target audience consisting of ALL Israel, both believing (elect) and unbelieving (non-elect) Jews, and (2) the elect are not the only ones who have gone astray. God laid upon the Lord Jesus, God's suffering servant, ALL of the iniquity of ALL that had gone astray. Without imposition of the 'no double jeopardy' template, the Bible here teaches unequivocally the universality of the atonement.

Luke 23:34-“*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* When Jesus uttered these words from the Cross, exactly WHOM did he have in mind? Included in “them” were most certainly (1) the Roman soldiers that crucified him, (2) Pilate and other Roman authorities consenting to his death, and (3) every member of the Jewish mob that cried, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” This petition was not a request that the Father save “them” from their sins, but a specific request that the Father release them from liability for crucifying him. Jesus in this petition asked the Father to show mercy to “them” due to their ignorance.

But here's the larger question: If Jesus was not suffering on behalf of "them", whoever the "them" were, upon what LEGAL BASIS could the Father have honored his Son's request? The fact is Jesus suffered for the sins of Pilate, the Roman soldiers, and the Jewish mob, based on this request for forgiveness. In addition, it's clear that the repentant thief, to whom Jesus promised a post-death presence in Paradise with him that very day, was included in the atonement. If the Father forgave "them" per our Lord's request, which we can assume he did, there MUST have been a LEGAL BASIS for doing so.

John 1:29-"*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*" John the Baptist made this proclamation. The imagery is that of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. ALL of the sins of the world were "taken away" by Jesus in his death. The Calvinist imposes his philosophical template to get "the world [of the elect]." But the template is no more applicable here than it was with the scapegoat. Moreover, "sin" is singular, signifying an all-inclusive, lump-sum atonement, ALL the sins of the ENTIRE world amassed in ONE unit. The singular "sin" (without regard for the quantitative aspect of Jesus' suffering) appears in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For he hath made him to be SIN for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The singular "sin" reinforces the qualitative aspect of the atonement, which is often blurred by the quantitative wrangling about 'how many' sins were borne by Christ.

Acts 16:31—"*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*." Will the Calvinist acknowledge that, when Paul extended this promise to the Philippian jailor, he was certain there was a LEGAL BASIS for extending it? Did Paul have some supernatural ability to discern whether Christ had atoned for the sins of the the jailor and his family? If not, how could Paul be sure that believing on Christ would result in their salvation? The answer is obvious, isn't it? Paul's gospel of Jesus dying for ALL meant the promise of salvation through believing was applicable to ALL.

Acts 17:30—"*God...hath commanded all men everywhere to repent*." In addressing the curious on Mars Hill, Paul told them the historical appearance of Jesus, his death and resurrection, left the human race with no excuse for ignorance about who God is and the basis upon which men can approach him. The 'Unknown God' of the Athenians is Jesus, God Incarnate. God now commands ALL men EVERYWHERE to repent of their ignorance, come around to God's way of thinking. Since God is commanding all men everywhere to repent, it follows there MUST be a LEGAL BASIS for the salvation of all men everywhere! The universality of Christ's atonement is again unmistakably and undeniably set forth. How could any honest interpreter of scripture take Paul's words to mean "all [elect] men everywhere"? If you're a

Calvinist with a 'no legal basis' template, you just might do that.
1 Timothy 2:6-“ *Who gave himself a ransom for all*.” *We* can easily determine the meaning of “all” from the context. In the previous verse, the phrase “God and men” is clearly a generic reference to mankind in general. The “all” for whom Jesus became a ransom refers to the same group of ALL mankind. Unless one imposes the 'no double jeopardy' template on this verse to render an “all [of the elect]” meaning, the truth of universality is unmistakable.
1 Timothy 4:10-“*the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe*.” The Calvinist again imposes his 'no double jeopardy' template to explain how the prima facia meaning of “all [of humanity]” cannot be the correct meaning. Instead of seeing “those that believe” as a subset of “all men” as the prima facia reading demands, Calvinists twist the phrase “all men” to mean “all the elect people” so that “those [elect] that believe” becomes a subset of “all [elect] men.” The Calvinist dismisses the prima facia meaning in favor of his 'no legal basis' hermeneutic to mute the universal ring Paul intended.
Hebrews 2:9-“*that he [Jesus] by the grace of God should taste death for every man*.” The Calvinist, in order to save his system, must employ his 'no double jeopardy' argument to turn “every man“ into “every [elect] men.” Fallen men taste death because of sin. Hence the spiritual juxtaposition of the text depicts Jesus tasting death for every sinner to whom the taste of death was due. The Calvinist, in order to save his Calvinism from oblivion, must silence the universal ring of the atonement.
1 John 2:2-“*And he [Jesus] is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our [believers] sins...also for the sins of the whole world [those still mired in unbelief]*.” Jesus was the satisfaction Godward for the believer's sins BEFORE he believed. Jesus is likewise the satisfaction for the sins of all those who have YET to believe or NEVER believe. The Calvinist will again impose his 'no double jeopardy' template to make “our sins” mean “sins of the believing elect” and “whole world” to mean “the whole world of the elect” who have not yet believed. If “whole world” is given its prima facia meaning of universality, the system of Calvinism goes kaput. But the Calvinist cannot let that happen no matter what the cost to biblical truth.
The fatal error of Calvinism with respect to suffering and 'no double jeopardy' lies in the doctrine of propitiation (satisfaction for sins). There is NO PROPITIATORY VALUE whatsoever to be found in the suffering of the lost in the Lake of Fire—NONE. Yes, it is true the lost sinner will be SUFFERING. But he will NOT be PROPITIATING a holy God with regard to his sins. Only the Lord Jesus had the ability to provide propitiation. The conflation of 'suffering' and 'propitiation' is

the Achilles Heel of Calvinism.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21. This passage is one of the most profound, Calvinism-killing texts in the Word of God. First, Paul shares his own inspired logic, affirming: “we thus judge [logically conclude], that if one died for all, then were all dead” (5:14). Paul assumes the 'condition' of universal atonement to be true (Jesus died for all), then states his 'conclusion' as true (all must have been dead). His logic makes no sense whatsoever if Jesus did not die for ALL who were dead in trespasses and sins. The Calvinist's 'no double jeopardy' template tells him to read it as “since Jesus died for 'all [the elect]', then 'all [the elect]' were dead." This is perhaps the most glaring example of Calvinism's intellectual dishonesty and the manner in which it bastardizes contexts. It insults the intelligence. Paul's argument is that Jesus died for ALL those who died in Adam! The “every man” of Hebrews 2:9 is a cross-reference to the “all” of 2 Corinthians 5:14. The ring of universality is unmistakable.

Secondly, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, “not imputing their trespasses unto them.” That is, on a holy God's part, he took away with the death of Christ every sin obstacle that stood between himself and the world of sinners. The profound gospel truth, seldom understood or preached, is that God, who laid upon his Son the iniquity of us all, is NEVER going to impute them again unto us. This truth is the death knell of Calvinism. For while the Calvinist argues God has NO LEGAL BASIS upon which he can require sins to be suffered for a second time, the Bible teaches there will be no second time for sin suffering since God is NEVER again going to impute to the world their trespasses. Sinners will not be suffering for sins in the Lake of Fire. They'll be suffering for unbelief, for their failure to believe on the Christ upon whom God laid their sins.

1 Peter 3:18-“*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust."* When the Bible says Christ “once” suffered for sins, it obviously means he only had to die once to atone for our sins. Since he settled suffering for sin once-for-all for ALL men, it's reasonable to conclude, based on the qualitative aspect of Christ's death, that genuine suffering for sin is a future impossibility for the sinner!

The fact that Christ suffered ONCE means no further suffering for sins is required by anyone, including the lost sinner. The Just One suffered on behalf of unjust ones. How many unjust ones? ALL the unjust ones. Attempts by Calvinists to make unjust ones mean unjust [elect] ones is another stunning example of the intellectual dishonestly that permeates Calvinism. As scripture reveals, the primary argument of Calvinism for 'no double jeopardy' has NO biblical basis.

We have examined sixteen texts that either affirm the universality of Christ's suffering or support that inescapable conclusion. At the

beginning of our journey through these passages, we observed that God had NO LEGAL BASIS upon which to make an offer of acceptance to Cain IF the suffering of Jesus did not include Cain's sins. We may draw the same conclusion with regard to modern-day gospel preaching. This is where all the philosophical mumbo jumbo about 'no double jeopardy' and 'no legal basis' becomes a millstone around the Calvinist's own theological neck. For if Particular Redemption is true, Christ dying for SOME but not for ALL, then God has NO LEGAL BASIS whatsoever upon which to offer forgiveness of sins and life eternal to those for whom Jesus did not die. Therefore gospel preaching that falls on the ears of Calvinism's nonelect would become a fraudulent enterprise. Yet Jesus commanded us to preach the gospel to EVERY creature. If the Calvinist contends that God has NO LEGAL BASIS to send to the Lake of Fire those for whom Christ suffered, he is bound to acknowledge that God has NO LEGAL BASIS upon which to bring to Heaven those for whom Christ did not die.

In conclusion, if lost sinners are not going to suffer for their sins, for which Christ once suffered, then for what are they going to suffer? They will suffer for unbelief that left them spiritually destitute and naked, lacking the righteousness of Christ. God imputes Christ's righteousness through justification by faith. Forgiveness of sins alone is NOT enough to save a man, to get him to heaven. The righteousness of Christ is required. Christ has done it all for sinners. Only the lack of faith, not their sins, will result in eternal suffering for the lost in the Lake of Fire. The unjustified sinner cannot endure the presence of a holy God without the garment of Christ's righteousness. The believer, justified by faith, is MADE the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. It is the imputed righteousness of Christ that makes a man fit for Heaven to spend eternity with the Lord. The suffering of Christ for ALL sinners makes forgiveness AND righteousness obtainable by ALL for whom Christ died.

In terms of judgment, believers and unbelievers alike will be judged according to their works. At the Great White Throne judgment, God will open the books, one of which is the Book of Life (Revelation 20:12-13). God is going to judge all men “according to their works.” But the final determiner of one's eternal destiny is whether their name is found written in the Book of Life. If one's name is not written therein, God will cast them into the Lake of Fire. They'll suffer because of unbelief that kept them out of the Book of Life. For believers, whose names are in the Book of Life, they will “receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). The basis of judgment for both believers and unbelievers is WORKS done in the body, not SINS. While it's true that all sins are works, not all works are sins. But all works are either

good or bad. That will be the basis of final judgment for both the saved and the unsaved. God is NOT going to judge men to suffer for the sins he judged ONCE in the Person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God will cast them into the Lake of Fire for unbelief, a place of torment he prepared for the devil and his angels.

As 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 confirms, God reconciled the WORLD to himself by the death of his Son. In doing so, he DID not (and NEVER will) impute the world's trespasses unto them. Nor will God require them to suffer for sins a second time. What a gospel truth, what good news! It remains for the world to be reconciled to God by believing on the One who suffered and died for them, and rose again. In doing so, God justifies the believer and clothes him with the righteousness of his Son, a garment that enables him to enter into the holiest, into the very presence of God.

The 'World' According to Jesus

This chapter of Gospel Deficiency examines those texts in which Jesus and other biblical writers used the word “world” to describe the scope of God's love as it pertains to the gospel. The preponderance of biblical evidence demonstrates that “world” is meant to be all-inclusive (without distinction, without exception) when used by biblical writers. Again, we are not trying to be exhaustive, but sufficiently selective to make the truth obvious. If just one of the many instances of “world” where it impacts the death of Christ for sinners signifies the totality of humanity, the entire system of Reformed Theology is defunct and falls flat on its face. Perhaps that explains the absurd (and intellectually dishonest) lengths to which Calvinists will go in their efforts to prove a limited atonement and strip the scriptures of any and all objective evidence of a universal gospel.

OT Background

The Old Testament is critical in this inquiry inasmuch as Jesus, Paul, John and other New Testament authors would have spoken and written with an Old Testament mindset. Calvinists claim to know what Jesus, for example, had in mind when he told Nicodemus, “God so loved the world.” They tell us that “world” in John 3:16 CANNOT mean what it says, or taken at face value, but rather as the world of the elect, some number less than the total number of earth's human inhabitants. But the Old Testament refutes such a baseless notion.

Many Old Testament usages of the word “world” make clear reference to the physical world without regard its inhabitants. But there are

many passages where “world” as defined by the context is unmistakably a reference to humanity, and in some case ALL of humanity. In Psalm 9:8, we find these words: “And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.” Here the words “world” and “people” are virtually interchangeable. David could have just as easily written that God shall judge the people in righteousness and minister judgment to the world in uprightness. The scripture says “the people” as opposed to “his people”, which would have given “the world” to mean the world of Israel. But no such limitation is stated or implied. The ”world” here is clearly ALL the people of the world, ALL of whom shall one day be recipients of God's righteous judgment.

In Psalm 33:8, we read: “Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. Again, Psalm 49:1: “Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world.” In Psalm 98:7, the Psalmist declares: “Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” In these three passages, the scripture clearly identifies the world as consisting of ALL of its inhabitants without distinction or exception. Psalm 96:13 and 98:9 both speak of the Lord's coming, and use the words “earth”, “world” and “people” as interchangeable terms.

The prophet Isaiah wrote in similar terms. We find phrases like “all ye inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth” (18:3); “all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth” (23:17); “the inhabitants of the world” (26:9,18; 38:11). The prophet Jeremiah also wrote of “all the inhabitants of the world” (Lamentations 4:12). Finally, the prophet Nahum spoke of judgment upon a burning earth, the “world, and all that dwell therein” (Nahum 1:5). All of these Old Testament mentions of the word “world” in their respective contexts give a meaning that is inclusive of EVERY inhabitant of the earth without distinction or exception. It carries with it the normal, natural meaning that the average man or woman in the pew or on the street can understand.

John and Jesus

As we move into the New Testament, we find an expected consistency with the Old Testament understanding of “world.” Matthew 13 records several kingdom-related parables that Jesus taught to the people. In 13:24-30, we find the parable of the good seed and the tares sown by the enemy. At a later time, his disciples asked him to declare its meaning (13:36). Jesus said: “The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one” (13:38). The “world” according to Jesus

consisted of both good seed (wheat) and bad seed (tares). Every soul on the face of the earth fits into one of these two categories. When Jesus therefore told his disciples to “go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”, there is no doubt whatsoever that by “world” he meant every man and woman, every inhabitant of the world. The same is true of his use of the word “world” in his one-on-one dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3.

With these many clear instances of the universal scope of “world” as a foundation, we move into the Gospel of John, where some Calvinists go ballistic trying to put into the mind and mouth of Jesus what they think he couldn't possibly have meant or did not mean when he used the word “world” in his conversations. But before John gets to our Lord's encounter with Nicodemus, he uses the word “world” five times himself. He tells us that Jesus was “the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). By “every man”, did John mean to say every “elect” man? In addition, Jesus was “in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (John 1:10). The “world” here contemplates the physical world that Jesus created, which served as his temporary habitation and that contained humankind with the cognitive ability to know things. The world at large, in its unregenerate state, did not know its Creator.

Moreover, John the Baptist made this proclamation upon seeing Jesus: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). It's perfectly reasonable to assume that John the Baptist used the word “world” in the same way the Old Testament prophets did-all the inhabitants thereof. Like the Old Testament scapegoat, which symbolically took away the sins of Israel into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement, the Lord Jesus would do the same for Jew and Gentile alike, for the good seed as well as the tares, for all the inhabitants of the earth, whether past, present or future.

We now come to the familiar passage that records the after-dark dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, a Jewish scholar who was insatiably curious about the teachings of one Jesus of Nazareth, a teacher come from God. This is where Calvinists circle the wagons. To a man, they will argue that the “world” of John 3:16 CANNOT mean every soul on the planet. Along with several philosophical arguments as to why this meaning cannot be, they proceed in typical fashion to cite other Calvinists that agree with them. They have to argue this, else their entire system of philosophical speculation falls apart.

The biggest problem with this baseless contention is a total disregard for the context. In this private meeting are the Son of God and Nicodemus. When the latter asked, “How can these things be?” with reference to the new birth, you have to believe he was both serious and sincere. Likewise you must believe that Jesus was also serious in

his response, and attempted to enlighten Nicodemus' mind. This is obvious by our Lord's reference to the brazen serpent in the wilderness. There was nothing enigmatic in Jesus' words. If Jesus meant “world of the elect” when he said “world” (a meaning Nicodemus would have NEVER arrived at on his own), then the Calvinist must cede that Jesus purposefully muddled the issue for him. In the context, there is NO way Nicodemus took the Lord's use of “world” to mean anything less than the totally of both Jews AND Gentiles. This is the Achilles Heel of Calvinism-bastardization of contexts. The system of Calvinism cannot survive without it.

In the course of conversation, Jesus likened the means of the new birth, a concept with which Nicodemus was struggling, to what was certainly a very familiar story to Nicodemus-the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14-15; Numbers 21). Life was given for a look of faith. Jesus then expands on the analogy. Even as God's love for a snake-bitten Israel moved him to provide a remedy for fiery serpents and their deadly venom, even so he loved the world to such an extent as to provide a remedy for sin and spiritual death through his only begotten Son through a look of faith (John 3:16).

This where intellectual honesty comes into play. In the context, Jesus moves from Israel as the object of God's love to the world. Isn't it reasonable to conclude that Jesus had in mind the same “world” of which the prophets spoke, the same “world” he cited in his own parable, which included both tares and wheat? Of course it does! Then there's Nicodemus, who's listening to what Jesus is saying. When the word “world” registered in his brain, what do you think Nicodemus understood the “world” to mean? The world of the elect? No, he took it to mean exactly what Jesus meant with both Jesus and Nicodemus having the same basis of understanding established in the Old Testament. It's eminently obvious to any intellectually honest individual that Nicodemus took “world” to mean exactly what Jesus meant-the entirety of humanity, including Gentiles along with the Jews. If one believes Jesus meant the 'world of the elect', then one must also concede that Jesus had no real desire to be understood by Nicodemus, who, being on the receiving end of our Lord's teaching, would have NEVER arrived at that meaning based on what Jesus said. So again, we see that the entire system of Calvinistic speculation is made to rest upon the argument that the word “world” as used by Jesus in John 3:16-17 CANNOT mean what Jesus said it meant-the entirety of humanity.

In John 3:17, Jesus proceeds to use “world” twice more. Any rational individual would cede that Jesus had the same world in mind with all three usages. Where the Calvinist makes his stand here is with the purpose clause in the subjunctive mode at the close of 3:17: “...that

the world through him might be saved." It's the 'adversative hina clause' argument: that is, the clause expresses certainty of purpose, no doubts, no contingencies. Since no purpose of God can EVER fail fulfillment, the "world" of which Jesus speaks, every member of which will be saved according to God's purpose, MUST mean the 'world of the elect' and CANNOT mean every member of humanity. This argument by the Calvinist is bogus, intended to bamboozle and hoodwink those with no knowledge of the original languages.

The subjunctive mode, according to any standard Greek grammar, is the mode of doubtful assertion, of hesitant affirmation. The adversative hina clause in subjunctive mode is used by Jesus in other places where his stated purpose is clearly in doubt. John 5:34; "But I receive not testimony from man: but [adversative] these things I say, that [hina clause] ye might be saved [subjunctive]." Was every hostile Jew within hearing range of that statement certainly saved? Doubtful! Consider the raising of Lazarus in John 11:24, where Jesus prayed: "And I knew that thou hearest me always: but [adversative] because of the people which stand by I said it, that [hina clause] they may believe [subjunctive] that thou hast sent me." Does this mean that every bystander within the sound of Jesus' voice believed after they saw the miracle? Maybe, but it's doubtful, just as the subjunctive suggests. For a more exhaustive analysis of the misleading and bogus 'adversative hina clause certainty' argument, please refer to Section 3: "James White on John 3:14-18 - An Examination", Note 21. Suffice it to say at this point that NO argument offered by the Calvinist to make "world" mean something other than "all humanity" can hold so much as a single drop of water. The simple truth is this. God loves EVERY sinner, and sent his Son to die for EVERY sinner. God's desire is that EVERY sinner be saved. The fact that all for whom Jesus died are NOT saved can be attributed solely to the failure of lost men to appropriate what God has provided.

In John 12:47-49, Jesus said: "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but [adversative] to save [hina clause with subjunctive] the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him." Again the Calvinist is faced with another passage that completely destroys in three succinct verses the entire system of Calvinism. While the Calvinist would insist that the two mentions of "world" here combined with the 'adversative hina clause', expressive of certain fulfillment of purpose, CANNOT mean every man (else his purpose would fail), Jesus included in that world he came to save ANY and EVERY man that hears his words and rejects them in unbelief. When Jesus spoke of the world, he meant every man on the planet, past, present and future.

There are two classic texts that illustrate the Lord's love for sinners that ultimately reject him. The first is found in Mark 10:17-27. A man with “great possessions” came running to Jesus, and asked: “Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” After reminding the man that the word “good” applied to God alone, the scripture says, “Jesus beholding him loved him.” Then Jesus instructed him: “Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up thy cross, and follow me.” The man's response was one of sadness, and he went away grieved. The fact that Jesus loved him proves beyond doubt that the rich man was part of the world of John 3:16. The fact that he rejected the words of Jesus proves he was part of the world of John 12:47-49. In order to defend the limited theory of the John 3:16 world, the Calvinist is forced to argue for another theory, that the rich man, because he was loved of Christ, eventually became a believer. But there is absolutely no biblical evidence to support such conjecture just as there is no biblical evidence to support a limited world in John 3:16. It is impossible to prove a theory with another theory.

The second passage is Genesis 4:3-7. It's the familiar story of Cain and Abel and the offerings that each brought to the Lord. The Lord had respect unto Abel's blood offering and rejected Cain and his offering. Cain was “very wroth, and his countenance fell.” Then the Lord loved Cain. No, the scripture does not use the word “love” in describing the Lord's reasoned approach to Cain. But in the question, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” we find a God more than willing to accept Cain and warn him against sin that was lying at his heart's door. That's love! This encounter, this dialogue, between the Lord and spiritually dead Cain destroys the first point of Calvinism, that of Total Depravity or Inability. For Cain actually carried on a conversation with God, understood what God said and rejected the Lord's counsel anyway, making him part of both the John 3:16 and John 12:47-49 worlds.

Now back to John 3. Jesus continued his instruction to Nicodemus, saying: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (3:19). Is Jesus speaking about the same world? Of course he is. The problem for the Calvinist is the “world” that MUST mean the 'world of the elect' just three verses earlier is now a world consisting of evil men who loved darkness rather than light. In order to be consistent, the Calvinist must now argue that God is going to save all the lovers of darkness who are condemned already inasmuch as they are the same world. That pesky little matter of intellectual honesty hamstrings the Calvinist every time.

In John 4, after Jesus had spoken to the Samaritan woman of Sychar

at Jacob's well, after she went to town announcing to the men of the city that she had found Messiah, and after the men came out to see Jesus for themselves, they affirmed to her: “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (4:42). What did these men have in mind when they mentioned “Saviour” and “world” in the same breath? It goes to the point of understanding what these Samaritan men of mixed Jewish and Gentile heritage envisioned when they said “world.” It is certain THEY considered themselves to be part of that world and that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed THEIR Saviour as well as THE Saviour!

The Lord's Prayer (John 17)

Now to a passage which the Calvinist cites in yet another vain attempt to prove that the “world” of John 3:16 simply CANNOT refer to every man because Jesus did not pray for them. Our Lord prayed: “I pray for them [my disciples]: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine” (John 17:9). This is clearly an intercessory prayer in which the disciples are the singular target. His prayer is for believers, his own. The world of unbelievers is NOT within the scope of this particular prayer. Jesus is in his 'Advocate' role, NOT his 'Saviour of the world' role. The fact that Jesus is praying for his own does NOT preclude his love for ALL men without exception or distinction. Jesus later added: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word” (17:20). It takes no genius to deduce that future believers were part of the present world at the time of intercession. So much for the 'Jesus didn't pray for the world' argument.

The Great Commission

Let us consider perhaps the last usage of the word “world” by the Lord Jesus before his ascension to the Father's right hand. In what has been called The Great Commission, Jesus said: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Here's another passage where intellectual honesty comes into play with a modicum of exegesis. First, the command in our English translation is an aorist (past) participle. The literal translation is: “having gone.” It's as if Jesus assumed the power of the Holy Ghost would drive the apostles and the church into the world. So “having gone” into the all the world, they are commanded to preach (herald) the gospel.
It is not just the world to whom Jesus commanded them to preach,

but “all” the world. The additional modifier means Jesus wanted no nation, no people and no individual left out. In a stroke of redundancy, Jesus added “to every creature.” The word “creature” (creation) is modified by the word “every”-an all-inclusive reference. No intellectually honest person would argue that Jesus had in mind anything less than the totality of humanity. The linkage of “world”, “all” and “every” by our Lord is clear evidence that when Jesus said “world” he meant every single individual on the planet. That's consistent with what he told Nicodemus.

They (the church) were to preach the gospel to all. What is the gospel? The gospel is the good news that Jesus has done something about our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). If Jesus died for some, but not all, then there is no gospel for those for whom Jesus did not die. This is a seminal fact where the gospel is concerned. The reason Jesus could command the gospel (sin solution) be preached to all is because he provided in his death a sin solution, an atonement, for all. Otherwise his command is meaningless.

Let's suppose for the sake of argument that the atonement of Jesus was limited in scope. If so, there is not a gospel for every creature. But to obey the Lord Jesus, the Calvinist must tell all the world, every creature, that Christ died for their sins. If a Calvinist tells a lost man that Christ died for his sins when in fact that lost man was not included in the atonement, then that Calvinist is a liar. It follows then that because Jesus told him to preach the gospel to all when there is in fact no gospel for the non-elect, he implicates Christ in his lie. Here's the bottom line. If you cannot look a lost man in the eye and assure him that Christ died for his sins, you cannot preach the gospel to that man. This why a true Calvinist is incapable of true evangelism! One cannot embrace limited atonement and preach the gospel to every creature! Reformed Theology is therefore gospel deficient!

This is where the Calvinist will break out the stale old argument that Jesus told us to preach the gospel to all without telling us who the elect are. It's our responsibility to tell the story and God's responsibility to awaken his elect. But awaken them with what? If you cannot appeal to a lost man based the work of Christ on the cross, what is the fallback message? Once again the gospel deficiency of Reformed Theology comes to the surface. For the Calvinist will argue that the gospel is the promise that if one believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he shall be saved (Acts 16:31). But that's only half of the gospel message-the appropriation part. The other half is the provision part-Christ died for our sins. The Calvinist, by preaching the appropriation part, thinks he is preaching the gospel. But in truth he is preaching only half the gospel. If he preaches the whole gospel, which consists of an appeal to appropriate the person of Christ based on the work of

Christ, he must of necessity, as a matter of intellectual honesty, disavow the entire system of Calvinism.

The failure to preach the provision for sin (the atonement for sins through the death of Christ) as the basis for an appropriation of the sin remedy (forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ) is symptomatic of gospel deficiency, which is endemic to Calvinism. It is an utter impossibility for a sinner to appropriate what God has not provided. For a Calvinist to argue that non-elect men, for whom Christ did not die, can be saved from their sins if they believe on Jesus is a lie of the first order. No provision for sin means no forgiveness for sin is possible! The 'sovereign' God of Calvinism cannot save a single sinner for whom Christ, his Son, did not die. An appeal directed at sinners to appropriate what God has not provided in the death of his Son is the epitome of folly, the grossest of hypocrisy and flagrant intellectual dishonesty. But that's exactly what the Calvinist signs on to when he embraces a limited (particular) atonement and all the other speculative theological postulations that accompany it.

The Church Infected with Calvinism

Over the years, I've received inquiries from various church members whose pastors preached the tenets of Calvinism. These were concerned folks, and rightly so. The common concern expressed was: “What can I do?” Because I have such deep respect for the relationship between pastor and people, it's difficult to give advice on how to deal with a Calvinist infection.

Churches can become infected with Calvinism in several ways. First, the church can call a pastor who's Calvinistic. If the church has already been groomed with Calvinistic thinking, it may not want a man who isn't a Calvinist. In such cases, pastor and church are a half-gospel match.

Secondly, a pastor with a biblical Gospel rooted in Universal Atonement can come into contact with Calvinistic thinking, whether by conversations with fellow pastors, by books or both. In time, the congregation will start hearing philosophical statements from the pulpit that support Calvinism. If you start hearing the argument about how God would not and could not allow for sin to be paid for twice, then you've probably got a pastor who's been infected. It won't be long before you start hearing content about election, total depravity and irresistible grace.

Thirdly, the pulpit committee of a pastorless church finds a man who is a Calvinist, but fails to do its doctrinal homework. The man may

have good character, a decent track record and overall appear to be doctrinally sound. But no one asks him the critical questions regarding the gospel. They just assume that because he's a Baptist, or whatever, he holds to orthodox views where the gospel is concerned. If he preaches in view of a call, he may bring messages that don't broach Calvinistic subjects. The church extends a call, the pastor accepts, moves onto the church field and begins his ministry. In time he'll start bringing messages that espouse Calvinistic philosophy- unconditional election, particular atonement et al. The congregation, stunned with what they're hearing, don't quite know how to react, especially if the pastor has told them opposition to Calvinism is an affront to the sovereignty of God.

This third scenario is all too common. There are websites that instruct Calvinistic preachers who accept calls to non-Calvinistic churches on how to gradually 'acclimate' the church to Calvinism. I saw one website with a two-year, month-by-month plan for the stealth Calvinist to take a non-Calvinistic church into 'Reformed Theology' land. It's almost cult-like and certainly deceptive. One of the tactics employed is a gradual grooming of the church leadership with Calvinistic thought. Once the stealth Calvinist believes he has sufficient numbers of deacons, elders and teachers sympathetic to his cause, he'll be more comfortable mounting a pulpit campaign. But it's like a termite infestation. By the time the termites are discovered, they've already destroyed a lot of lumber. The stealth Calvinist does to churches what termites do to houses.

During my days in Jacksonville, Fl, I worked with a young man who was Calvinist, with whom I shared a call to preach. We had many conversations about the gospel. Yet I was unsuccessful in convincing him to rethink his philosophical views. A church in Alabama contacted him about being their pastor. He subsequently preached in view of a call, The church called him to become their pastor. Before he accepted, I asked him if the church was a Calvinistic church. He said they were not, but would be in time. I advised him not to sell his Jacksonville home until he was sure the church was OK with his Calvinism. I'm so glad he took my advice. Within three months of becoming pastor, he had the church in turmoil. Instead of acquiescing to his Calvinism, the church decided to cut their losses and request his resignation. Fortunately for him, he was able to move his family back to Jacksonville and get his old job back.

The opposite scenario happens in other churches. When a traditionally non-Calvinistic church blindly calls a stealth Calvinist as pastor, and the doctrinal tension finally builds to a pitch, the pastor, thinking he's doing God a service with his Calvinism, will blame the congregation for its 'rejection of truth.' If the church splits over the new teaching, he

may stand fast and let the disgruntled sheep leave. With a remnant signing on to his philosophy, he'll start building a Calvinistic congregation with a halfgospel at its core. If he's lucky, enough of the flock will stay with him, able to support him financially. He may be a great Bible expositor in most aspects. But his gospeldeficient Calvinism will keep the church in an infected state.

I know of another situation in the Midwest where the pastor became a Calvinist while serving a church that was traditionally non-Calvinistic. He was able to move the church gradually into Calvinism. In time, all his adult Sunday School teachers had embraced Calvinism. The Associate Pastor, however, never bought into the infection. Years later, when the pastor left for another church in another state, the church called the Associate Pastor, a non-Calvinist, to be the new pastor. One of his first orders of business was to replace every Calvinist teacher in his adult Sunday School. That was a tough and courageous decision to make. But he was serious about rectifying the half-gospel infection that had found a home in his church.

So what do you do as a universal atonement Biblicist when Calvinism raises its ugly head from the pulpit? Well, if you're not a member of the church, but just searching for a church home, get out of there and keep looking. Don't get wrapped up in the programs, etc. Judge the church by it gospel. If you are a member but hold no key positions, talk to your pastor and express your concerns. Don't get ugly about it. If the pastor is adamant about his half-gospel and it's a matter of conscience for you, it may be time to move on. This is easier said than done when one has been a church member for years under several pastors that maintained a biblical gospel. Deep roots are hard to pull up. But in the end, you'll have to decide whether a half-gospel ministry is something your conscience can tolerate and support.

If your church has lost its pastor and you're asked to serve on the pulpit committee, be sure to ask any prospective pastor what his gospel is BEFORE he ever steps foot into your church. Any preacher who embraces the tenets of Calvinism should be removed from further consideration. If you are just a member that's not on the pulpit committee, make sure the committee is going to ask these questions. When I lived in Jacksonville, FL, I was asked to participate in an ordination council with a view to ordaining a fine young man. There were several that participated. When it came my time to ask the candidate any questions I might have, I asked only one, and it was this: “For whom did Christ die?” He answered correctly to my satisfaction-“For ALL!” If he had answered, “The elect”, or anything else that suggested belief in a Limited Atonement, I would not have been able, with good conscience, to sign his ordination certificate.

The infection of Calvinism is widespread across many churches today.

Many denominations are known for their Calvinistic doctrine. They are what they are. There's no changing them. But in a denomination like the Southern Baptists, there is a mix of Calvinist and non-Calvinist congregations. If your pastor is a graduate of Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY, he is likely a half-gospel preacher, infected with the tenets of Calvinism. If you're a member of a non-Calvinistic, Southern Baptist church, and your church extends a call to a graduate of Southern Seminary, prepare to be infected.

Most Calvinist preachers are good men, including those from Southern Seminary. They typically have a strong view of scripture, of justification by faith and are decent Bible expositors. But their Calvinism leaves them with half a gospel—the offer of salvation through faith in Jesus without a corresponding assurance that a basis for that faith exists in the atonement of Christ.

Section II: Calvinism Cures

The Gospel Deficiency of Reformed Theology

Do you remember the words, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is"? Bill Clinton made this statement before a Federal Grand Jury on August 17, 1998, in response to allegations he had previously lied under oath regarding a sexual affair with a White House intern. He further explained that the word "is" as understood to mean "is and never has been" would have an entirely different meaning than "is" as in "there is none." He argued that his former sworn testimony was "a completely true statement" because he had the second meaning in mind. My thought was that any politician who resorts to this kind of etymological hairsplitting to defend his integrity is desperate indeed!

Politicians are not alone in their ability to manipulate word meanings to their advantage. Theologians have done so for centuries in order to defend interpretations of scripture or further a doctrinal agenda. Reformed theology is a case in point. One key issue is the meaning of the word "world" (Gk. kosmos) as used by Jesus and the Apostles to describe the object of God's love (John 3:16) and the extent of the atonement (John 1:29). There is an interpretive axiom that says: "If the plain sense of scripture makes good sense, seek no other sense, lest you make the plain sense to become nonsense." The plain sense of "world" in John 3:16 is "humanity in its entirety (Jews and Gentiles without exception or distinction).

Reformed theology rejects the plain sense for another sense that is

essentially nonsense, using a lethal mix of Aristotelian logic and misapplied scripture to arrive at a meaning of "world" that equates to the "world of the elect". It teaches that God loves only the elect and that Jesus died only for them despite a plethora of biblical evidence to the contrary. Reformed theology (Calvinism) is truly Clintonesque in its attempt to redefine the "world" that God so loved and reconciled to Himself through the death of His Son (2 Corinthians 5:14-19).

At the close of His ministry, our Lord Jesus spoke these words: "I *am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world*" (John 12:46-47). Jesus used the word “world” three times in these two verses. It CANNOT mean the "world of the elect" because Jesus included in that world every soul that hears His words and rejects them! In other words, the "world" as defined by Jesus consists of the elect (believers) and non-elect (unbelievers) alike. The elect are those who believe; the non-elect are those who persist in unbelief. Jesus declared He came to save them all, and all were the objects of His love! These two verses alone, if properly understood in context by the intellectually honest student of scripture, obliterate the entire system of Calvinism!

Reformed theology is a speculative system of philosophical thought that suffers from a major gospel deficiency! The scriptures reveal that the apostolic gospel message consists of two main themes: the PROVISION God made for the sins of mankind, and the OFFER of forgiveness and life to all who believe it. The provision is expressed in the words: "*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures*" (I Corinthians 15:3). In this passage, Paul restated the core message he had preached to the Corinthians before they were saved, the same message he preached to every one he evangelized.

The offer is expressed in the words: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*" (Acts 16:31). The validity of the offer is absolutely contingent upon an actual provision for sin. The only way Paul could have extended the offer to include the jailor's household was a conviction that Jesus had provided a sin satisfaction for EVERY man in His vicarious death. Reformed theology is incapable of such conviction, and is therefore hamstrung by a gospel that only partially resembles that which Paul declared to the Gentiles.

Jesus and the apostle Paul both proclaimed a universal OFFER of salvation backed by a universal PROVISION for sin! Anything less is a departure from apostolic doctrine. Reformed theology, because it suffers from a gospel deficiency, should be rejected by every Bible believer. It was Jesus Who commanded the gospel to be preached to EVERY creature. If there are some for whom Jesus made no provision

for sin, how then can there be a gospel for them? And if the gospel offer is not backed by an actual provision for sin, how then is it possible for a Just God to hold the 'non-elect', for whom Christ did not die, accountable for rejecting a gospel that is 'non-applicable' to them?

No Gospel in a Limited Atonement

The gospel from the days of its inception has been under attack. Satan will continue to do everything within his subtle and deceptive power to destroy or diminish it. He has no qualms about whom he uses to do his dirty work. He will use a secularist to assail the historicity of the resurrection, and create doubts about the authenticity of the message. He will use the religionist to argue that the cross represents the consummate act of an exemplary life, demonstrating what it takes to earn a resurrection from the dead rather than what it really is—a vicarious substitution for sinners and the payment for their sins. Perhaps his greatest delight is to use the Christian theologian for the purpose of limiting that atonement. If he cannot destroy the message, he is certainly willing to take what he can get to diminish its appeal or application to a lost and dying world.

What exactly is the gospel? In 1 Corinthians 15:1-6, Paul declared to the church at Corinth the same message he preached to them while they were still lost in their sins —a message they received and by which they were saved through faith in the Christ who suffered in their stead. Paul delivered to them what he had first received from the Lord, that "*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen...*" (15:3-5). The good news Paul preached was that God in Christ had provided a remedy for (i.e., had done something about) their sins, and attested to the nature and value of Christ's death by raising him from the dead on the third day.

Paul believed without equivocation that Christ died for all men without distinction or exception, and therefore could look with confidence into the eye of any man anywhere on the planet, and declare: "Christ died for YOUR sins!" No pulpiteer who lacks that confidence has any right to call himself a gospel preacher, because the cross is the crux of the gospel. Earlier in the epistle, Paul affirmed that preaching the cross of Christ was equivalent to preaching the gospel (1:17-18). Preaching the gospel is preaching Christ crucified (1:23). Preaching Christ crucified is to declare to every sinner that Christ died for his or her sins, and that his precious blood was shed for them. According to Jesus, Paul's boss, the gospel was meant to infiltrate "all

the world" and to be heard by "every creature" (Mark 16:15). So much for limitations!

Preachers of a limited atonement will find themselves at odds with Paul, his gospel and with Christ Jesus himself. Intellectual honesty will require of them they declare the following to their congregations: "Christ may or may not have died for your sins! Call upon the Lord Jesus and cross your fingers! If he died and rose again for you, he will save you. If you were excluded from that limited number for whom Christ died, he has neither the desire nor the ability to save you!" Few if any limited atonement preachers will ever display that kind of honesty. But it's exactly the dilemma they face when they attempt to limit to a select number what Paul openly applied to all!

In an effort to mask the aforementioned dilemma, limited atonement preachers typically resort to redefining the gospel. Charles Haddon Spurgeon is an example. In a sermon entitled "Election No Discouragement To Seeking Souls", Spurgeon made this statement: "Furthermore, if we understand the gospel at all, the gospel lies in a nutshell. It is this: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...This promise is the gospel" (Spurgeon's Sermons, Vol. 8, p. 233). It's clear the apostle Paul understood the gospel, and would have this to say to Spurgeon: "That promise, brother Charles, is not the whole gospel. The gospel is the offer (or promise) of forgiveness and life eternal based upon the good news that Christ died for our sins!" Because Spurgeon embraced the false doctrine of limited atonement, it was impossible for him to declare the gospel that Paul articulated. He was forced to redefine it because of the limited value and scope he placed upon the death of Christ.

In the same message, Spurgeon declared: "If any man who ever lived, or ever shall live, believes in Jesus Christ, he hath eternal life. Election or no election, if you are resting upon the rock of ages, you are saved. If you, as a guilty sinner, take the righteousness of Christ—if, all black and foul and filthy, you come to wash in the fountain filled with blood —sovereignty or no sovereignty, rest assured of this, that you are redeemed from the wrath to come" (Ibid, p. 233).

These words have a ring of truth, but are hypocritical. Spurgeon's theology taught him that there was neither effectual grace nor a fountain filled with blood for those excluded from the atonement. Spurgeon's words are indicative of his intellectual dishonesty in this area. Moreover, they enable us to understand that the great success of Spurgeon's ministry can be largely attributed to his inconsistencies with the tenets of Calvinism rather than his embrace of them.

The false doctrine of limited atonement has no place in gospel preaching for there is little or no gospel in it. Yet many good men of God fall prey to and get carried away by its philosophical appeal. If

you are attending a church with a limited atonement pastor, your church is virtually gospel-free. Lost sinners will never hear the good news that Christ died for their sins unless the pastor's preaching is inconsistent with his doctrine, as was Spurgeon's.

Connecting the Gospel Dots

The student of Paul's inspired writings cannot help but notice the logical manner in which he presents gospel truth, so that certain conclusions may be drawn from his linguistic constructions that are inevitable, unavoidable, and indisputable. At the top of the list is the gospel itself.

I am somewhat bewildered by the efforts of some within the Southern Baptist Convention to find common gospel ground upon which both Calvinists and Biblicists can stand. The problem with these efforts is that the gospel ends up being redefined as (reduced to) the OFFER of salvation ("believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved") without its BASIS ("Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures").

The most prominent transgressor in this regard is Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY under the direction of President Albert Mohler. Southern Seminary runs its ads in many SBC state publications as teaching the "authentic" gospel. But this is false advertising. The authentic NT gospel has always consisted of the cross (i.e., the good news that God in Christ did something to atone for our sins) as the basis for believing in the Lord Jesus. It is therefore a virtual impossibility for any Calvinist to preach the authentic gospel.

What was the gospel that Paul preached? If we are able to define it according to scripture, should it not be the one gospel that is consistently held to and preached by every man of God? Let's connect the gospel dots.

First Corinthians is a good place to begin. In Chapter 1, Paul provides an absolutely convincing set of dots. In 1:17, he affirms that to preach the gospel is to preach the cross of Christ. In 1:18, he states that the preaching of the cross is the power of God. If we compare this statement of Paul with his letter to the Romans, where he declares that the gospel, of which he is not ashamed, is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16), we may conclude that the central theme of gospel preaching is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul follows up these affirmations by recounting "Christ crucified" as both the core of his gospel preaching and its power (1:23-24). And again in 2:2, he affirms that "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" was the central theme of his preaching to lost Corinthians from which he

refused to be deterred. Now, if Paul subscribed to and taught limited atonement as Calvinism would have us believe, just what was it about the cross that he preached? No amount of contorted reasoning from the Calvinist can gainsay the fact Paul preached the cross as the all-inclusive atonement for the sins of man both God-ward and man-ward. To argue otherwise is to misrepresent the apostle Paul's own testimony, and to exhibit intellectual dishonesty in the handling of gospel truth.

When Paul gets to Chapter 15, he recounts the gospel he preached to the Corinthians while they were yet in their sins. His method is meticulous. He states: "*I declare unto you [in this epistle] the gospel which I preached unto you [before you believed]*" (15:1, brackets/italics mine). It is the gospel you received and by which you are saved, unless you believed in vain (15:1-2). That gospel [good news] is that "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures" (15:3). He was subsequently buried, raised from the dead on the third day, and seen by many, including me (15:4-8). Could Paul have been clearer about the all-inclusive nature and scope of the atonement? Did he not connect the gospel dots in such a way as to eliminate any and every other gospel pretender?

The gospel of both the apostle Paul and the Biblicist is not the gospel of Calvinism. It's simply that the philosophical speculations of Calvinism, which include a false theory of limited atonement, hamstring the Calvinist with half a gospel. He or she is able to declare with conviction that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will bring salvation to the believer, but lacks the ability to preach the cross of Christ as the all-inclusive goodnews basis upon which God in Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him.

If you are one that has been hoodwinked by the speculations of Calvinism, it is our prayer that this simple exercise of connecting the gospel dots will serve to liberate you from Calvinism's half-gospel trap. If Christ did not die for all, what assurance can any individual have that the Lord Jesus died in his or her place? Is not the Lord Jesus incapable of saving any sinner for whom he did not die? Is not the preaching of the gospel to every creature, as Jesus commanded, impossible without an all-inclusive atonement for every creature's sin?

A Brief Overview of Depravity

Depravity is a word used in theological studies to describe the spiritual condition of man following the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Inasmuch as depravity signifies moral corruption, the epithet appears to be appropriate. The word itself—like sovereignty and Trinity—is never used in scripture, but can serve as a useful label

if we rely upon biblical contexts to ascertain its true meaning.

The very last resource a believer should consult in his or her quest to formulate a sound theological system is books on systematic theology. While many of these volumes represent the efforts of good and godly men to paint a bull's eye on various aspects of the truth, they are not inspired. Nor can it be assumed that decades of study in the original languages (Hebrew and Greek), ancillary languages (Latin, German, and French), and other theological works give the learned Ph.D. an edge over the average Joe in the pew in arriving at a biblical view of depravity. Adjectives like "total" and "radical" as applied to man's depraved condition have probably done more to obfuscate rather than illuminate the issue.

The evidences and attributes of depravity can be readily extracted from the English version of Genesis, Chapters 3-4, in your King James Bible. According to scripture, the fall of mankind into a depraved state through the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12) was concurrent with these four words: "and he did eat" (Genesis 3:6). Knowing that Adam and his descendants died spiritually in that moment of time (2:17), we therefore conclude that spiritual death is the sine qua non—the essential element—of depravity.

Jesus confirmed that essence by affirming that believers are "passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Paul likewise confirmed it by instructing believers at Ephesus: "And you hath God quickened [brought back to spiritual life], who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). It is the spiritually dead, both small and great, that shall one day stand before God at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-12). If a man or woman is spiritually dead, he or she is depraved!

The events that transpired immediately after the fall, which include the interaction between the LORD God and the depraved first couple, are very instructive. They identify for us both the trademarks of depravity and the capacities that depravity leaves in tact. The picture painted by the scriptures can differ significantly from what one might find in a theological volume on the subject, especially a Calvinistic one.

The first trademark of depravity is an aversion for God's presence (Genesis 3:8). Adam and Eve "hid themselves from the presence of God amongst the trees of the garden" upon hearing his voice—a voice that was once the harbinger of intimate fellowship. A second trademark of depravity (and closely akin to the first) inherent in this aversion is fear. When the Lord God confronted Adam, he acknowledged: "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (3:10). This self-awareness or "open-eyed" condition represents the introduction of conscience—the innate ability to discern good from

evil. Adam is now suffering from the pangs of conscience. He may have marveled how just one act of disobedience could have so radically altered his perception of God and the manner in which he now chose to respond to his Maker. In popular parlance, perhaps he felt like he had been run over by a Mack truck. In a sense he was—and worse! Such is the nature of sin and the depravity that's left in its wake!

A third trademark of depravity is the tendency to assign at least partial blame for one's sin to another. In this case, Adam blames Eve for procuring and offering the forbidden fruit. Eve in turn blames the serpent for an act of beguilement that led her astray. None of this accusatory rhetoric, however, was able to deliver either of them from the consequences of their sinful actions. Nor will excuses avail at the Great White Throne.

It should be noted that the plummet of Adam and Eve into spiritual death and depravity left certain capacities in tact. First, these two spiritually dead individuals retained the ability to hear God's voice and communicate with him. There is no evidence that God performed an act of "sovereign grace" in regenerating Adam and Eve before being able to conduct a meaningful dialogue with them. In fact, it can be argued that a God whose hands are so tied is less than sovereign. I have no doubt Adam and Eve left the garden with spiritual life restored, but not until they received from God's hand coats of skins from the substitutes that died in their stead. Secondly, they did not lose the ability to speak the truth. Adam may have hid himself initially, but told it like it was when confronted. Eve likewise gave testimony in the divine presence that was consistent with the facts. Yes, depraved men and women tell lies, but depravity, in and of itself, does not guarantee that they will.

The salient point in any discussion on depravity is the depraved must be evangelized if they are to be saved. They are first and foremost spiritually dead. The gospel of Jesus Christ—the story of God incarnate who died for their sins and rose from the dead the third day—is the antidote that can restore them to spiritual life and a relationship with God if it is heard and believed. But they cannot hear without a preacher!

A Biblical Perspective on Depravity

What two distinctions do the words Trinity, sovereignty, and depravity have in common? First, all of them represent sound Bible doctrines taught by orthodox Christianity. Secondly, none of them is

found in the scriptures. For this reason, the unorthodox religious world customarily accuses the Biblicist of fabricating doctrines the Bible does not teach.

The Word of God, however, does set forth the concepts and precepts represented by these theological terms. God is revealed as a Tri-Unity of Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Godhead is supreme in authority, executing their will and good pleasure without consultation from any external entity. The Bible portrays fallen man as morally corrupt and spiritually bankrupt. In theological lingo, this condition is referred to as "total depravity".

The doctrine of total depravity as articulated by orthodox Christianity teaches that man is as bad off as he can be regarding his condition although he might not be as bad as he can be in terms of his actions. The initial act of sin caused Adam and Eve to incur spiritual death immediately, and the Bible tells us that spiritual (and ultimately physical) death passed upon all men as a result (Romans 5:12). In one tragic moment, they fell from the heights of sublimity to the depths of enmity. The initial indicator of depravity was an aversion for the presence of God. It rendered Adam and his posterity totally incapable of approaching God apart from a grace intervention.

Cain and Abel were therefore born into this world as totally depraved sinners. The manner in which God dealt with these two brothers, especially Cain, is critical to our understanding of total depravity. The fact is God graciously interacted with totally depraved men thousands of years before the first theologians drew battle lines over its meaning and extent. A sober reflection upon God's behavior toward Cain as recorded in Genesis 4:1-16 is worth more than a thousand theological volumes on the subject!

It is useful to observe the effects of total depravity upon Cain. First, he exhibited a total disregard for the kind of sacrifice God required (4:3-4). The prescribed way of approach to God was a blood offering that symbolized a life sacrificed in place of the sinner who presented it. Abel complied with an attitude of submission; Cain disobeyed with an attitude of rebellion. Secondly, God's disrespect for his offering was met with anger rather than inquiry (4:5-6). He might have responded, "Lord, I desire your acceptance! What would you have me to do?" He essentially raised a clinched fist toward God, saying in effect, "How dare you disrespect the hard-earned work of my hands!? My offering is every bit as good as Abel's!" Thirdly, he disregarded his privileges as firstborn as well as the gracious warning of impending sin (4:7). Fourthly, he committed the act of murder, gave false testimony in Lord's presence, and incurred additional curses (4:8-12). At the last, he complains of his unbearable punishment without the first word of confession or ounce of sorrow regarding the sin that caused it (4:13).

Cain teaches us that at the end of the road called total depravity stands the inn of brazen infidelity!

So what was the difference in these two brothers? Did God do something for Abel that He refused to do for Cain? The context provides the answers. First, Abel believed and obeyed God while Cain chose unbelief and disobedience. In contrast to the baseless claim that God simply "passed over" Cain in the matter of personal salvation, the Lord made it perfectly clear to Cain that acceptance (i.e., a righteous standing before Him) was solely contingent upon a willingness on his part to do the right thing (4:7). Secondly, the argument could be made that God actually did more for Cain than He did for Abel in terms of grace! The Lord graced him with His personal presence, reasoned with him One-on-one, reiterated the terms of acceptance, warned him of the potential dangers of disobedience, and set a mark upon him to preserve his physical life, postponing an appointment with eternal damnation!

It is a remarkable truth that Cain, the first man born into this world, was also the first vessel of wrath that God endured with much longsuffering—a man who fitted himself [middle voice] to destruction by his own devices (Romans 9:22). The same precious grace that Cain resisted was sufficient to save Abel from his sins.

There is nothing like a biblical context to set the record straight on doctrinal issues like depravity. Is it possible to reflect upon the Lord's interaction with Cain and draw the theological conclusion that God in his sovereignty simply withheld from Cain the ability to believe, an ability he gave to Abel?

Does Regeneration Precede Faith?

One of the fatal flaws of Reformed theology (i.e., Calvinism) is its twisting of the biblical concept of faith. Calvinism reckons faith as a work that man does, and therefore constitutes a contribution by the sinner to his salvation. The reasoning is that since faith is a work, and works are the fruit of salvation, then faith exercised must be the result of regeneration. The argument is made that since lost men are spiritually dead in sins, they have no capacity for faith. Regeneration in the elect grants them the ability to believe, and they embrace Jesus Christ by faith as a result of regeneration. The example cited as the strongest proof of this is the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. He was summoned to life, and then came forth.

Calvinism insists that placing regeneration before faith excludes man as a contributor to his salvation, and therefore preserves all the glory

for God. The Reformed argument juxtaposes monergism (God is the only one who works in bringing salvation) over against synergism (God and man both work to bring about salvation), and insists that monergism alone is Biblical. The reasoning is that if regeneration is contingent upon faith, then man has worked to bring it about, and God does not get all the glory.

The problem with this erroneous logic propagated by Calvinists is that faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). The Bible suggests that the stronger a man is in faith, the more God is glorified (Romans 4:20). Biblical faith speaks of man casting himself upon the mercy of God with an awareness of his total and absolute inability to contribute one iota to his salvation.

In passages such as Romans 4:5, 16, the apostle Paul paints a stark contrast between faith and works, and excludes faith from the works category altogether. Paul taught it was faith that enabled grace to make the promise sure to all the seed (i.e., the elect). Reformed theologians who label their opponents synergists and semi-Pelagians, who defend the Biblical position of faith before regeneration, have absolutely no foundation upon which to stand!

John Wesley, in a message entitled The New Birth, speaks of the two great works of justification and regeneration in connection with our salvation. He rightly reasons that though both of these Divine acts take place instantaneously in a moment of time, justification must logically precede regeneration. His thought is that in justification God does something FOR us, washing away our sin and guilt, so that in regeneration he is free to do something IN us. It is admittedly a fine point to argue since the scriptures represent faith as requisite to both righteousness and life. The point is Wesley properly understood the relationship between faith and regeneration. Faith precedes regeneration; belief comes before birth!

Jesus Himself taught that this was the case. In John 3, Nicodemus had asked: "How can these things be?" in response to our Lord's teaching on the new birth. In His answer, Jesus reached back to the Old Testament incident involving a snake-bitten people, and a brass serpent on a rod in the middle of the camp (John 3:14-15). The word went forth that a provision had been made for snakebite. Those who had the death sentence in themselves could receive healing and life for a look of faith! So which came first, the look or the life? Jesus taught that in the new birth (i.e., regeneration) the believing set the stage for the birthing!

John concluded this chapter saying: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him" (John 3:36). Did you catch that phrase in the middle? He that believeth not the Son shall

not see life! For the intellectually honest student of scripture, that single phrase alone slams the door shut on the regeneration-before-faith doctrine, and essentially destroys the entire system of Calvinism! According to the Calvinistic view of depravity, a sinner must receive life before he can believe. According to Jesus and John, a man must believe before he can receive life! Who do you trust on the matter?

The argument from John 11 regarding Lazarus appears rather formidable if you assume that Jesus meant it as a picture of the new birth. But did he? The problem with this assumption is the conflict it creates with John 3. The fact is Lazarus' resurrection was intended to portray a physical resurrection in the future, not spiritual regeneration. When Jesus called Lazarus by name, he was not addressing the dead corpse. He was summoning the spirit of this saved man from Abraham's bosom in order to reunite body and spirit. In so doing, He demonstrated His power and glory as the Resurrection and the Life! Regeneration, on the other hand, takes place under an entirely different set of circumstances; that is, with soul and body still in tact.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians concerning "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). The operative phrase is "in Christ" or its equivalent. He included the relationship between the work of the Spirit and their faith, saying: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in who also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). The word “trusted” is italicized in the Authorized Version. The verb itself is not there, but the Greek construction implies that the Ephesians had trusted Christ in like manner as did Paul and his associates (1:12). The phrase “after that ye heard” is the translation of an aorist active participle. The literal rendering is, "having heard, ye also trusted in Him." The phrase “after that ye believed” is also an aorist active participle. The literal rendering is, "having believed, ye were sealed." In Paul's mind, the hearing comes first, then the believing, and then the sealing.

Three observations from Ephesians 1:13 are in order. First, both of the aorist (past) participles are active voice. Paul as easily could have used the passive voice in both instances to convey the sense of "having been made to hear" and "having been made to believe." That certainly would have played into the hands of Calvinism. But Paul employed the active voice under Spirit inspiration to indicate that sinners are active participants (not to be confused with contributors) in their salvation. Secondly, the Ephesians had heard the word (logos) of truth. It appears that, in Paul's mind, the 'logos' and the 'rhema' were interchangeable, both having the ability to ignite faith in the hearers.

Lastly, we have the sealing of the Spirit taking place after faith is

exercised. This fact creates a serious dilemma for the Calvinist. If regeneration (the new birth) takes place in the elect prior to their exercise of faith, at what point do they become sons? Is not regeneration synonymous with sonship? Is it possible to have an unbelieving and unsealed son without the earnest of his inheritance?

Galatians 3:6 says: "Ye are all the children [sons] of God BY FAITH in Christ Jesus." In John 1:12, the power (authority) to become a son of God was granted to as many as received him. John taught sonship was a consequence of believing on Jesus. In order for the Calvinist to defend his regeneration-before-faith doctrine, he is obligated to explain how it is regeneration does not actually result in sonship.

Let it be said that the regeneration-before-faith doctrine cannot be supported by the truth of Scripture. It is nothing more than philosophical rationalism—the child of human reason! The Calvinist is forced to take this position in defense of total depravity (i.e., total inability) and unconditional election.

God's eternal decree and sovereign good pleasure with regard to redemption is to save them that believe! The elect are those who have believed through grace (Acts 18:27). There is nothing meritorious or synergistic about their faith! God's work of regeneration takes place in response to faith wrought by grace in the heart of a believing sinner! This in no way detracts from the glory that God receives in redeeming His elect from the hand of the enemy! It rather affirms and promotes that glory!

The 'Look and Live' Object Lesson

The dictionary defines an object lesson as a concrete illustration of a moral or principle. The object lesson is one of the most powerful and effective tools available for communicating profound spiritual truth! It is therefore no surprise that the Lord Jesus employed object lessons on a regular basis throughout His teaching ministry.

One of the key recipients of an object lesson was Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night to express his personal conviction regarding the divine origin of His ministry. In the one-on-one discourse that ensued, Jesus focused upon the new birth as a requirement for kingdom entry. Nicodemus, who held the rank of master (teacher) within the religious hierarchy of Israel, struggled unsuccessfully to grasp the spiritual significance of the words “ye must be born again” (John 3:7). In an effort to build a bridge of understanding, Jesus cited an OT incident recorded in Numbers 21:5-9 to illustrate the God-ordained means whereby a spiritually dead man

might experience spiritual birth. Nicodemus was no doubt familiar with this historical event.

The object lesson was stated as follows: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:14-15). Three observations are in order. First, the brass serpent was clearly intended to foreshadow Christ on the cross. The snake-bitten Israelites who looked upon the brass serpent were required to behold the very image of that which was the cause of their impending death. Likewise, he who beholds Jesus on the cross is brought face to face with his own sins inasmuch as Jesus was made sin for us, who knew no sin (II Corinthians 5:21), and his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree (I Peter 2:24).

Secondly, the remedy was put in place to benefit every Israelite who suffered from the deadly venom. None of them was excluded! Reformed theologians argue that, because the remedy was limited to the nation of Israel, the atonement of Christ on the cross was therefore limited to the elect. This spurious analogy breaks down simply because none of the surrounding nations suffered from the same plague, and no evidence exists that every Israelite had been bitten.

Thirdly, a distinction must be made between the cure provided and the cure appropriated. The Lord instructed Moses, saying, "It shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live" (Numbers 21:8). The cure for snakebite was set in place when Moses lifted up the brass serpent on a pole. The cure saved no one! The Lord required a look of faith in order for the cure to become effectual in those who were snake-bitten. The fact that "much people of Israel died" (21:6) indicates that many of the snake bitten, for whatever reason, failed to appropriate the cure. The only limitation placed upon the cure was lack of faith in those for whom it was provided. No theologian in his right mind would argue that the cure was irresistible, or that those who perished from snakebite suffered from a total inability to look upon the brass serpent!

The word "so" is an adverb used twice in our text. It can refer either to the extent (degree) of an action or to the manner of an action as compared to another. The first usage clearly signifies comparative manner. The lifting up of the Son of man would take place in like manner as the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. The second usage has been seen traditionally as signifying the extent or degree to which God loved the world; that is, he loved so much that he gave his unique, one-of-a-kind Son. If Jesus, however, used the adverb in both instances to signify likeness of manner, then his purpose would have been to impress upon Nicodemus the similar manner in which God, who acted out of loving compassion for snake-bitten Israelites, was preparing to act in behalf of all men, both Jew and Gentile, who were under condemnation and wrath because of sin and unbelief!

In this object lesson, the Lord clearly intended to draw a parallel between snake-bitten Israelites and sin-bitten humanity as a whole! In his two usages of the phrase "whosoever believeth," Jesus established a distinct class of individuals who will experience the new birth and everlasting life! The world represents the larger class for whom a sin cure has been provided. The ones who believe represent the sub-class that appropriates the cure! The fact that Nicodemus later defended the ministry of Jesus (John 7:50-52), and assisted Joseph of Arimathaea with his burial (John 19:39-40), is a good indicator that the object lesson worked!

Could the Lord Jesus have made the means to the new birth any

clearer? A lost sinner who is dead in sins is born again by looking in faith to the Christ Who died for his sins and rose again the third day. It is all a matter of grace through faith! By using this object lesson, Jesus established for all time the principle of look and live as the way of salvation and the means to the new birth. May the Lord grant to all of us this week an opportunity to share the truth of this object lesson with someone who has yet to appropriate the cure for sin!

Election and the Last Days

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 sparked a resurgence of interest in biblical prophecy concerning the last days. Many are asking, “Where are these events taking us? What shall the end be? And how will they ultimately affect me?” For the believer in Jesus Christ, there is no need to scramble for the latest prophetic volume at the local Christian bookstore. The Word of God is replete with answers, several of which were disclosed by the apostle Paul in the second chapter of his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:1-17). In this passage, Paul expounds upon the day of Christ (2:2), providing words of comfort for believers (2:13, 17) and warnings of condemnation for unbelievers (2:10-12).

Paul had apparently received word that the church at Thessalonica had been shaken in mind and troubled by certain words and letters from prophetical impostors regarding the day of Christ. The gist of the false teaching was that the day of the Lord was already underway, implying that faith in Jesus had done nothing to deliver them from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10). It was therefore necessary for Paul to restore the former confidence by reiterating his doctrine of the last days.

The day of Christ would not begin until (1) believers had been gathered together unto him at his coming, (2) apostasy within the church (a falling away) had become rampant, and (3) the Antichrist (the man of sin, the son of perdition) had been revealed (2:1-3). The mystery of iniquity is already at work, but will be hindered by the Spirit of God until he is removed with the Church (2:7).

Paul therefore issued these words of comfort, saying, “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2:13). He employed the doctrine of election as a source of comfort. The salvation to which they had been chosen was deliverance from the day of wrath, which was now nearer than when they believed (Romans 13:11).

Election was predicated upon the proclamation of gospel truth, the

sanctification (convicting work) of the Spirit, and belief of the truth in response to the grace ministered by the Spirit and the Word. In other words, election is conditional. The phrase from the beginning refers to the beginning of the gospel ministry in Macedonia during the second missionary journey (Philippians 4:15), which took Paul's mission team from Philippi to Thessalonica (Acts 16:40-17:1).

Wresting these words of comfort from the context as a proof text for unconditional election blurs the distinction between what God determines eternally and what He demonstrates historically. Jesus was, in an eternal sense, the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8), but was crucified historically outside the gates of Jerusalem in 33 A.D. In like manner, the Thessalonian believers were "chosen in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), but were actually elected in Christ circa 53 A.D. through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Election in the NT is always in Christ, who is the chief cornerstone, elect, and precious" (I Peter 2:6). God's elective decree is that all who believe on His Son Jesus, who is the Elect One, shall be chosen in him to receive and experience all the elective benefits of grace (Ephesians 1:3-14), including deliverance from the wrath to come.

Paul likewise issued warnings of condemnation for those who refused to receive and believe the truth, but rather had pleasure in unrighteousness (2:10-12). According to Paul, those who reject gospel truth in this age will be deceived by Satanic signs and lying wonders wrought by the Antichrist, and will suffer delusion and damnation because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. The phrase "love of the truth" signifies the love of God toward all mankind that emanates from the gospel. In Paul's mind, God had provided a full satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and desired for all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4). The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica, who were moved with envy, recruited lewd fellows of the baser sort in opposition to the gospel, and set all the city in an uproar against Paul and his associates (Acts 17:1-5), had the opportunity to be elected to salvation if they had received and believed the truth. They chose rather to resist the Holy Ghost like their fellow countrymen in Jerusalem (Acts 7:51).

Brethren, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a great comfort to know that God has secured our future through his elective purpose in Christ. For both receivers and resistors, the question "How will the events of the last days ultimately affect me?" has been answered. The believer has been elected to escape the day of wrath! The unbeliever who persists in unbelief faces a future fraught with eternal danger! Where do you stand?

Known and Foreknown of God

Romans 8:28-30 is a passage Calvinists routinely cite as confirmatory of the doctrines of election and predestination. But like most Calvinist proof texts, a contextual and exegetical treatment of the passage reveals that it does not teach what the Calvinist says it teaches.

The Calvinist is correct in asserting that God's foreknowledge is more than mere knowledge of future events based on his omniscience. It is a personal knowledge of an individual based on his eternal purpose to save them that believe. Peter gave voice to this truth in his sermon at Pentecost: "Him [Jesus], being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

Peter indicted the Jews for crucifying and killing the Son of God. But he enlightens them to the fact they exercised their wicked wills within the context of God's perfect will! While they were taking counsel together against Jesus (John 11:53), there was a greater 'counsel' (Gk. boule) in play, a determinate counsel, that set a predetermined horizon for Christ.

The word "foreknowledge" is 'proginosko', 'to know beforehand'. It's in a Greek construction with 'boule' that connects the foreknowledge of God with his counsel as part of that counsel. God knew what would happen; he knew it because he predetermined it. Integrated with the counsel of God was an infinite amount of foreknown detail fundamental to the determination. But that vast reservoir of knowledge is unknowable by man. As Paul said: God's knowledge is deep, his judgments unsearchable and his ways past finding out (Romans 11:33). Suffice it to say God foreknew the acts of the Jews because he determined by counsel that his Son Jesus would be the recipient of those acts.

The word "determinate" is the perfect passive participle of the verb 'horizo' (Eng. horizon). It means 'to set a boundary or limit, to define' and modifies the verb "delivered". The literal translation is 'this one having been boundaried'. The One having been boundaried (fenced in) by divine counsel to be the sacrifice for our sins, God delivered (gave over) to his executioners to carry out his sacrificial death by means of crucifixion!

While Peter's remarks have to do with the death of Christ, they nevertheless connect the concept of foreknowledge with what the Godhead in three-way counsel determined to be done. God does NOT decree things because he knows things. He knows things because he decrees things! God foreknew the events surrounding Calvary because he determined (set the boundaries) from eternity to deliver up his Son.

In like manner, when God determined before the foundation of the world to save them that believe, he knew immediately every one of those believers on a personal level.

The classic example is Jeremiah, to whom the Lord delivered these words of assurance: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, [and] I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). Jeremiah was known, set apart for ministry and ordained to preach before his parents conceived him. It was the sovereign purpose and good pleasure of God to save 'them that believe' that caused him to know Jeremiah. Foreknowledge in itself is not causative. It is, however, fundamental to what the boundary-setting counsel of God determines.

The Romans 8 Text

Now to Romans 8:28-30: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

The first order of business is setting the context, which one can find in 8:28, 33 and 39. Paul is making the case for the impossibility of those who love God from EVER being separated from the God that loves them or having their relationship with God severed. He makes his case based on the call of God, which is in line with (1) his eternal purpose to save them that believe, and (2) the fact that God foreknew them, predestinated them, justified them, called them and glorified them. That’s a case for inseparability if ever there was one!

There are five verbs used by Paul to describe God’s redemptive relationship with his elect. See “My Personal Experience with Calvinism” for valuable insight on who the Elect are (8:33) and when God elects them. The doctrine of election is integral to the context. Our focus is on the verb “did foreknow.” The KEY to understanding these verbs, however, is the fact that ALL five are aorist (past tense) in Greek. Paul represents them ALL as accomplished actions. But when did they occur? Did they occur concurrently (at the same time) or consecutively (in stages)?

Some Calvinists cite this popular text as proof that God did all these things for his elect simultaneously before the world began. That makes sense when one considers election in an eternal context. Others see it as a Golden Chain of Redemption, a series of five consecutive links, that began with two links in eternity past (foreknowledge,

predestination), two links added within the corridors of history (justification, calling) with one final link added in eternity to come (glorification). Another distinct possibility is that God performs ALL these actions simultaneously in a temporal context the moment a sinner believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe this to be the correct view. ALL of them are true of God's elect (8:33). ALL are the experience of believers. NONE of them is true of unbelievers!

A Comparative Passage

Let's consider what Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia: “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” (Galatians 4:8). In reasoning with the Galatians, Paul argues that knowing God translates into liberation from bondage to law. So why return to it?

Furthermore, he stresses that God knowing them was a weightier matter than their knowing God. The word “rather” (Gk. mallon) means 'to a greater degree or larger measure.' Paul uses the Greek verb 'ginosko' (to come to know) to describe both the knowledge they have of God and the knowledge God has of them. It's generally used of knowledge acquired from experience. Paul employs an interesting use of verb tenses. The phrase “ye have known God” is an aorist active participle. The phrase “are known of God” is an aorist passive participle. The Galatians were literally 'ones having known God' who were to a larger measure 'ones having been known of God.'

The Galatians came to know God at the point they believed. But since time had elapsed from then until the time of writing, he uses the aorist participle to capture that time frame. They are therefore ones having known God. In like manner, and more importantly, they were ones having been known of God. Since Paul uses the aorist in both references, it makes sense to reckon God's knowing of them as beginning at the same point in time. That certainly appears to be Paul's intent. If he meant to say that God's knowing of them was antecedent to them knowing him, he might have employed the imperfect tense or another Greek construction to make that distinction. But that's not the point Paul makes here.

What we have is an apparent contradiction. How could God know Jeremiah before he was born but NOT know the Galatian believers before they believed? The explanation lies in the difference one MUST make between the eternal and the temporal. In an eternal context, according to God’s eternal purpose to save them that believe, God knew both Jeremiah and the Galatian believers on a personal level BEFORE they believed. But in a temporal context, God knows NO

sinner on an experiential level UNTIL he or she believes on the Lord Jesus. There is no contradiction when this key distinction is made.

Known and Foreknown

The verb "did foreknow" (past tense) cannot be used of a lost man. God 'knows' the yet-to-be believer (present tense). It can even be said that God 'foreknows' (present tense) that individual. But only AFTER he or she believes can it be said that they were 'foreknown' of God (past tense). God knew (foreknew) Jeremiah before he was born. But at some point, likely in his youth, he came to know the Lord by faith and God came to know him, just as he came to know the Galatians. But it was only AFTER Jeremiah believed that he was 'foreknown' (past tense).

Paul is addressing Roman believers who became 'foreknown' at the point of faith, when God came to know them and they came to know God. Believers can ONLY be deemed 'foreknown' of God when the eternal becomes temporal. The other four verbs apply to the foreknown as well. The believer, who now has 'foreknown' status, is also predestinated by God to be conformed to the image of Christ. Since a 'foreknown' (past tense) status is contingent upon faith, so also is a 'predestinated' status, a 'justified' status, a 'called' status and a 'glorified' status. They ALL happen at the same time in a temporal context. There is no Golden Chain, but rather a Golden Collection of spiritual realities for the believer once he is IN Christ and Christ is IN him; once he knows God and God knows him!

When we consider Paul's purpose in describing these realities, it makes perfect sense to mention foreknowledge first. But as for the other four verbs, they are in no particular chronological order. He could have placed 'called' or 'justified' ahead of predestination since God performs ALL of them concurrently when the sinner believes on Jesus. He could have placed predestination at the end of the list.

The primary scope of this study is to examine the doctrine of foreknowledge. But if one studies the verbs 'called' and 'elected' in the NT, he or she will find they are virtually synonymous. In fact, Peter uses them in tandem, admonishing readers to give diligence to make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). This admonition makes nonsense of Calvinism. For if that dubious system is correct, there is NOTHING—zero, zip, nada—a man can do about his calling or election! Moreover, election logically precedes calling in Calvinism. If the Calvinist insists on a chronological listing of verbs by Paul in Romans 8:29-30, why would he not insist on the same approach to 2 Peter 1:10, which would have a man called before elected?

Another argument by Calvinists for a chronological unfolding of the

five verbs is that “glorified” is mentioned last. Glorification is normally associated with the final resurrection, when the vile body of the believer will be fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body (Philippians 3:21). So the Calvinist reckons it a done deal in the mind of God. I have no argument with that mindset.

But a further look at scripture reveals that God glorifies the believer the very moment the Holy Spirit takes up residence in his body. Paul writes: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18). While FINAL glorification is yet to come, the PROCESS of glorification is in full swing. It began at regeneration! When sinners believe, they are glorified by virtue of the Spirit’s presence in them.

God decreed in eternity past by a determinative counsel that his Son would be the Redeemer for sinners. The Father ‘elected’ the Son for that purpose (1 Peter 2:6). He also decreed that he would save them that believe; lost men who would come to him through faith in his Son. These would be his ‘elect’ ones, who would derive an ‘elect’ status by virtue of their union with the Elect One, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The instant those eternal decrees were made, God knew his elect in a personal way. As time ensued and made its way through the temporal chambers of history, those whom God foreknew came to a place of faith due to his gracious influence, at which time they came to know God and God came to know them. Those whom God ‘foreknew’ became the ‘foreknown’.

I shake my head in amazement every time I hear an alleged theologian, in the context

of election, define ‘foreknowledge’ as what God in his omniscience knew man would do and thus chose to save the man. It is said that God elected men to be saved because he knew they would believe. That is, God chose them for salvation because he knew they would chose Christ. Some standard theological texts (e.g., Systematic Theology by Henry Thiessen) promote this view.

Can anyone fault the Calvinist for his objections to this reasoning? It's nothing more than an unbiblical bailout that attempts to offer an alternative to the unbiblical view of unconditional election taught by Calvinism. Neither Calvinism nor Arminianism will get the student of scripture to the truth of election! And then there is that flawed (and almost insulting) analogy that says: “God has a vote, the devil has a vote and we have a vote. The way we vote decides the election!” That unbiblical quip is the product of intellectual laziness and totally misses the truth of biblical election.

Light from Peter

The apostle Peter wrote these words to 'scattered strangers' in his first epistle: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:2). Peter calls them “elect” because they are believers. “According to” is 'kata' in Greek, used in connection with the noun “foreknowledge” in accusative case. Its meaning is 'in agreement with'. What God knew to be true about them in the present was in agreement with what he foreknew from eternity due to his decree to grant an ‘elect’ status to them that would believe in his Elect Son. These strangers with their ‘elect’ status were anything but strangers to the Father! While the world was rejecting them, the Father had wrapped them up in his elective love!

They came to that ‘elect’ status “through sanctification of the Spirit.” The preposition 'through' is 'en' in the Greek. The case is dative of sphere. That is, God elected them in the sphere of the Spirit's ‘setting apart’ work as he reproved (convicted, convinced) them of sin, righteous and judgment (John 16:8). It is abundantly clear that biblical election takes place AFTER the Spirit completes his convicting work with a faith response from the convicted. Conviction precedes election! The botching of the doctrine of election by both Calvinists and Arminians has led to centuries of needless confusion and contention.

Peter said God elected them “unto obedience.” The preposition “unto” is 'eis' in the Greek, used in connection with the noun “obedience” in accusative case. It denotes an 'entrance into' or a 'direction toward' its object. The purpose of election is a new direction for the believer, an entrance into a life of obedience. Jesus, the Elect One, learned obedience by the things he suffered (Hebrews 5:8). God desires for his elect to emulate their Lord. In concert with obedience, believers are elected with a view to the “sprinkling” of the blood of Christ. It is a daily and dynamic sprinkling (cleansing) that takes place as we walk in the light as he is in the light (1 John 1:7).

The election of believers is in agreement with what God knew due to his eternal decree. As we said earlier, God knows things because he decrees things! Election is preceded by conviction that leads to persuasion. Its design is that believers live a life of obedience in fellowship with the Father, a fellowship sustained by a daily, hourly, minute-by-minute sprinkling of the blood of Christ. Peter is essentially telling his readers to keep their eyes on the ball and remember WHO they are and WHOSE they are. May we go and do likewise!

A Popular But Misapplied ‘Proof Text’

In harmony with the Spirit’s convicting work as requisite to election is Paul’s word to the Thessalonians: “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Calvinists love to cite this ‘proof text’ in defense of unconditional election. But notice that God chose them “through” (Gk. en, dative of sphere) the setting apart work of the Spirit AND the belief of gospel truth. In addition to Peter teaching us that conviction precedes election, Paul confirms that both conviction AND persuasion constitute the sphere in which God elects believers. No man is elected UNTIL he is first convicted of his sin and then believes the truth of the gospel.

The Calvinist typically makes two mistakes here. First, he takes the phrase “from the beginning” as prehistoric. But since election in a temporal context cannot take place until a lost men man is convicted and persuaded, the phrase MUST have reference to the beginning of Paul’s ministry at Thessalonica. It was a reminder of how eagerly they heard the gospel and embraced it.

While the phrase “from the beginning” does refer to the creation in some passages (Mark 10:6, 13:19; John 8:44; Acts 15:18), it is also used to refer to specific points in time, such as (1) the beginning of Christ’s earthly ministry (Luke 1:2; John 6:64, 8:25, 15:27), and (2) the beginning of Peter’s vision experience that took him on an evangelistic trek to see Cornelius at Capernaum (Acts 11:4). So interpreting the phrase as a reference to the beginning of Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica is in exegetical harmony with the context and its biblical usages elsewhere.

The second mistake Calvinists make is assigning a meaning to 'salvation' that the context disallows. When he cites the verse as a proof text, he has in mind a salvation from sin, as in justification. But that cannot be the case since Paul represents election as something that takes place AFTER conviction and persuasion.

The context demands that we interpret this salvation as deliverance from the Day of the Lord-the Seventh Week of Daniel-concerning which false teachers had convinced the Thessalonians they were about to experience and endure. But Paul had taught them previously that the Lord would ‘catch away' believers to be with him forever BEFORE the Day of the Lord ensued (2:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). In others words, Paul taught the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church!

Conclusion

It is my prayer that this examination of God's foreknowledge — including the point at which believers God 'foreknows' become the 'foreknown' — has been instructive. These truths may be unfamiliar IF Calvinism or Arminianism has guided your biblical studies and molded your theological viewpoints. But lack of familiarity is no reason to dismiss the truth. I've spent forty years studying these doctrines with an open mind. They are biblical, defendable and hermeneutically solid!

I would encourage you to acquire a copy of The Other Side of Calvinism by Lawrence Vance, Ph.D. It's the most thorough, well-documented and rock-solid critique of Calvinism on the market and validates the truths set forth in this document.

I am neither Calvinist nor Arminian. I am a Biblicist! Those two popular systems of theological thought are both arbitrary and erroneous, have produced centuries of senseless conflict among the people of God and tend to blind adherents to spiritual light that comes from unbiased, contextual handling of the Word of God.

One of the great tragedies of ecclesiastical life takes place in our Bible colleges and seminaries where opinionated professors indoctrinate the minds of young preachers and channel them into a structured theological system before they're able to establish their own theological persuasions based on their own exegetical and expository work!

The Bottom Line: Foreknown or Never Known

The bottom line is a term that refers primarily to the lowest line in a financial statement, showing net income or loss. In its more general usage, it represents the essential point of an argument or the final result of an analysis. The bottom line is a valuable commodity because it sets forth in black and white what might otherwise be seen in enigmatic shades of gray.

The student of Scripture will find many bottom lines embedded within the pages of Holy Writ, especially in the matter of salvation. One bottom line with which all of us are familiar is that there are only two types of people who have ever walked the face of the earth—believers and unbelievers. The same bottom line might also be expressed as the saved and the lost. The Bible furthermore sets forth this dichotomy as those whom God foreknew and those whom He never knew!

What exactly does it mean to be foreknown of God? The Greek word is 'proginosko', a combination of 'pro' (beforehand) and 'ginosko' (to know). Its NT usage, however, tells us that much more than prior knowledge or awareness of individuals is implied. It rather signifies that God had intimate and personal relationships with certain people because He determined them to be so! It is said that Christ was foreknown (KJV "foreordained") before the foundation of the world as the Lamb without blemish and without spot (I Peter 1:20). Israel was foreknown by God as the instrument of Messianic fulfillment (Romans 11:2). Moreover, individual believers were foreknown by God, as stated in Romans 8:29-30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

The comments of Spiros Zodhiates regarding this third usage are helpful. He concludes: "Proginosko essentially entails a gracious self-determination on God's part from eternity to extend fellowship with Himself to undeserving sinners" (The Complete NT Word Study Dictionary, p. 1216). Those whom God foreknew are those with whom He determined to have a relationship!

Does the Bible provide any clue as to who these people are? Yes, it does! They are believers! While it is true that God has mercy upon whom He will have mercy (Romans 9:18), it is also true that God has concluded all men in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all (Romans 11:32). The fact is God has willed to have mercy upon all who by faith cast themselves upon His mercy. The Bible says that it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (I Corinthians 1:21), which is in harmony with the good pleasure of His will (Ephesians 1:5), the good pleasure that He has purposed in Himself (1:9), the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of is own will (1:11), and the eternal purpose that He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11).

God's eternal purpose as an expression of His good pleasure has always been to save them that believe! These are they who are foreknown of God, with whom He has determined to have a personal and eternal relationship! Only in the philosophical speculations of Calvinism will you find God withholding the ability to believe from some while regenerating others prior to justification so they can believe. Both Jesus and John the Baptist taught that belief was requisite to spiritual birth and life (John 3:14-15, 36).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned that the performance of noteworthy religious service was not to be mistaken for knowing God or being known of God (Matthew 7:21-23). According to Jesus, only

those who do the will of the Father may be assured that such a relationship exists. His shocking profession at the Judgment to those who had prophesied, cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in His name (apart from absolute surrender) would be, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” He never knew them, and they never knew Him, although they knew much about Him! God knowing us is more critical than our knowing God. Christ’s acceptance of us is a far weightier matter than our acceptance of Him

All of us belong to one of these two groups—the foreknown and the never known! To which do you belong? Is it possible to know? Absolutely! If the convicting work of the Spirit has led you to a place of repentance (a surrender of your will to His) and faith (humble dependence upon the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus for salvation), you are among the foreknown, the predestinated, the called, the justified, and the glorified. Apart from grace-wrought repentance and faith, the issue (from a human perspective) will ever remain in doubt.

It is my conviction that no lost person should ever concern him- or herself with whether they are foreknown or predestinated. The only relevant issue is whether he or she has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The answer to that question will ultimately determine their eternal destiny!

The Work of God

It was in the synagogue at Capernaum nearly two thousand years ago that Jesus defined the work of God. The teaching session was interactive in nature, meaning that the attendees were afforded the opportunity to offer feedback and submit questions to the guest lecturer. But this was not your average synagogue crowd. In the back of their minds was the recent miraculous feeding of several thousand Jews with five barley loaves and two small fishes. Many in the congregation were eyewitnesses who had been satiated with the overabundance.

A campaign to make Him king had been set in motion, marked by a willingness to invest whatever labor was required to make it happen. Jesus knew that a selfish desire for continued physical fulness was behind the effort, and exhorted them to redirect their labor toward “that meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (John 6:27). The response “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” indicated a desire for specifics (6:28). So the Lord said: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (6:29).

Two ideas appear to be melded together in this definition. First, the work of God is the abandonment of any works of righteousness that

one might deem necessary to earn everlasting life. If a man wants to do the work of God, and experience everlasting life, which the Son of man alone can give, he must stop working to earn it and start trusting to receive it! Secondly, the work of God is the gracious endeavor of the Father to draw unregenerate sinners to His Son, so that they might believe in Him and have eternal life! Engaging in the work of God is engaging oneself with the God who is working to ignite faith in the hearts of the lost.

After Jesus defined the work of God as faith that excluded meritorious works of righteousness, they immediately began to excuse themselves from such faith because, as they saw it, sufficient evidence was lacking to command such trust. They reasoned that Jesus, who had fed them once, was no match for Moses, in whom they allegedly trusted, who had fed them for forty years in the wilderness. Jesus forthwith returned the dialogue to matters spiritual and eternal, contrasting the earthly, perishable bread given through Moses with the heavenly, nonperishable bread that the Father was giving to the world through His Son Jesus.

Anyone who studies the content of this passage will reach the inescapable conclusion that giving is at the core of the work of God! The Son of man gives everlasting life (6:27). The Father gives to men the true bread from heaven (6:32) The bread of God gives life unto the world (6:33). Jesus gives His flesh for the life of the world (6:51). The Father who draws men (6:44) gives to them the ability to come to His Son (6:65). The Father gives to the Son every drawn individual who believes, and none of these shall ever be lost (6:37, 39).

The phrases “all that the Father giveth me” (6:37) and “all which he hath given me“ (6:39) are an interpretive challenge for any expositor or theologian. In His divine and practical wisdom, however, Jesus included the interpretive keys within the text itself. The verb “giveth” in 6:37 is present tense, signifying durative or continuous action. Jesus is referring to a giving activity that began with John the Baptist and continued into the present hour. A literal translation is “every one that the Father is in the process of giving to me shall come to me.” The verb “hath given” in 6:39 is a perfect tense, signifying completed action with abiding results. In this statement Jesus included all who had been given to Him up to that moment.

The meaning that emerges from the text is that the Father is continually giving to the Son, one by one, those who believe on Him to life everlasting. All who are given become an abiding possession of Christ, and for that reason none of them shall ever be lost. This is the Father’s will! The use of these two verb tenses in the order that Jesus used them was designed (1) to teach us that the work of God is primarily a real time activity, and (2) to disabuse us of the notion that

this giving of the Father was a done deal in eternity past! The cumulative result of what the Father is giving to the Son in the present will determine what the Father hath given to the Son at the time of reckoning.

The Father is still engaged in the work of drawing and teaching sinners in order that they might believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved. It becomes more apparent with each passing day that this world is starving for spiritual sustenance. The Bread of heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the only answer! The first order of business for any man is to hear and learn from the Father those things that pertain to His Son, and, having been taught, to come to Christ, believing on Him unto life everlasting. The second order of business is to become a laborer together with God, distributing the bread of the gospel to all who suffer from spiritual hunger. This is the work of God— the noblest work on the face of the earth!

An Analysis of Romans 9, 11

The scope of Gospel Deficiency is to examine the relationship between the gospel of Jesus Christ and Calvinism, and expose the gospel deficiency of the latter. Contrary to Calvinistic thinking, the text of Romans 9-11 does NOT directly impact the gospel message. There is NOTHING in the ninety verses of these three chapters that alters one iota the good news that (1) Jesus died for ALL men, dealing with their sins in a propitious manner, and (2) men can find forgiveness of sin and eternal life through faith in him. Many Calvinists claim they became Calvinists as a result of reading sections of Romans 9-11 and appeal to these passages as proof of Unconditional Election, upon which the doctrine of Particular Redemption rests. It is therefore needful to consider these select verses in their context, rightly divide the Word of God and dispel a few Calvinistic myths in the process.

Romans 9:1-24

Paul begins by expressing his genuine concern for Israel's salvation (9:1-3). He said he was willing to trade his salvation for theirs. In order to assure readers his claim is not rooted in cheap sensationalism, he affirms the Holy Ghost himself will attest to his claim. He describes this burden for his kinsmen as “great heaviness and continual sorrow.” His heaviness of heart was exacerbated by an awareness that a people so privileged by God could become so estranged from him. Notwithstanding God's adoption of the nation, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, the promises of

God and being the national line through which Christ came, they rejected him (9:4-5).

As dismal as things had become for the nation, all was not lost. The word of God to Israel HAD taken effect in some. There was a genuine spiritual Israel that existed within the physical Israel (9:6-8). The "seed" that God would call from Isaac was Christ (9:7; Galatians 3:16). God made the promise to both Sarah (where Isaac was concerned) and Rebecca (where Jacob was concerned). Christ, Isaac and Jacob were all ELECTED. The "purpose of God according to election" was to bring Christ into the world via Isaac, Jacob and their descendants (9:11). This elective plan would stand as unalterable! Both Isaac and Jacob were second-born sons. By his sovereign prerogative, God rejected the first-born sons and chose the second-born sons to fulfill his elective purpose. It was not based on works that either Esau or Jacob would perform in life.

Rebecca was told: "The elder shall serve the younger" (9:12). In the Old Testament record of these two brothers, Esau NEVER served Jacob. The reference MUST therefore have been to the two peoples that came from their loins, NOT to the brothers themselves. In subsequent history, the descendants of Jacob would indeed subjugate the Edomites and fulfill God's promise. God's love of Jacob and hatred of Esau are tied to the context of God's elective purpose (9:13). The proper understanding of God's hatred of Esau in the context is that of rejection. That is, God rejected any claim firstborn Esau might have had where the lineage of Christ was concerned. God rejected first-born Esau for this role and favored the second-born Jacob in accordance with his elective purpose. God's hatred (rejection) of Esau was not a personal matter affecting his salvation. There was NO unrighteousness with God in doing so (9:14). We are fourteen verses into these chapters and Paul has said NOTHING regarding the gospel and personal salvation. The promise and purpose of God have to do with Christ and God's elective plan to bring him into the world through the lines of Isaac and Jacob, not Ishmael and Esau.

While the words 'sovereign' and 'sovereignty' are never used in scripture, the concepts certainly are. In the flow of the text, Paul cites an OT example involving Moses and his remarkable act of intercession on Israel's behalf (9:15-16). The Lord threatened to destroy the entire nation of Israel for their idolatry at the foot of Sinai, and raise up a new people from Moses. Moses dissuaded the Lord from this drastic act by appealing to his reputation with the Egyptians. The Lord relented, but later reminded Moses that he would shew mercy to whom he would shew mercy (Exodus 33:19). The outworking of God's mercy would express itself in sparing the lives of "little ones" under age twenty and allowing those age twenty and over to die through

natural attrition during forty years of wilderness wanderings. So we see that the sovereignty of God regarding Moses and Israel had nothing to do with personal salvation, but physical life and eventual entrance into the Promised Land. The Lord shewed compassion to the entire nation in feeding them and in suspending wear on their clothing and shoes over those forty years. There is even a possibility that thousands of stiff-necked Israelites repented during the wilderness wanderings and found personal salvation. But by God's sovereign will, none of those who might have repented were allowed entry into Land of Promise. God eventually denied Moses, his beloved friend, the mercy of Promised Land entry because of an act of anger in striking the rock at Meribah instead of speaking to it as God directed (Numbers 20:8). While the Calvinist is insistent about God's sovereignty, and rightly so, personal salvation is not in view.

Interpretive Background

Before we move on to Pharaoh, it will prove useful to lay some groundwork with regard to God and the salvation of lost men. First, God always has and always will desire that all men come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). No passage better illustrates this truth than God's reasoned dialogue with Cain, the first man to come into the world through the womb, before he murdered Abel. From the very beginning, the Lord made clear his love for all men and his desire to accept them if they did right. Ezekiel further validates this truth when speaking for the Lord: “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth (Ezekiel 18:32), and “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (33:11). In both passages, the Lord follows with this appeal: “Turn and live.”

Secondly, in Romans 10:21, Paul quotes Isaiah: “All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” Sounds like a call to me. The reality of God's perennially outstretched hands is a truth we must balance with any talk of sovereignty. Jesus told Israel how often HE WOULD have gathered them to himself as a hen gathers her brood but THEY WOULD NOT be gathered unto him (Matthew 23:27; Luke 13:34).

Thirdly, John said that Jesus “lighteth EVERY man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). In John 12:35-36, Jesus urged followers to believe in his light and walk in his light so long as the light was with them, LEST darkness come upon them. The sovereign God of scripture is every bit as merciful as he is sovereign. He NEVER creates a man without a light source to which that man can respond or reject, even if that source is conscience. God DOES indeed give sinners over to reprobate minds, but not until they reject light for darkness, and

choose not “to retain God in their knowledge” (Romans 1:24,26,28). We can say assuredly God gives over to darkness those who first give themselves over to evil. In one text, men being “past feeling” gave themselves over to lasciviousness (Ephesians 4:19). In another, residents of Sodom, Gomorrah and surrounding cities gave themselves over to fornication (Jude 1:7).

Fourthly, Romans 1:18-20 says: (1) lost men “hold the truth in unrighteousness,” (2) “that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them,” and (3) they are “without excuse.” This eternal truth applies to Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Judas, Pilate and all the “vessels of wrath” God raises up to accomplish his sovereign purposes, make known his power and declare his name throughout all the earth.

Lastly, in Romans 11:32, Paul confirmed: “For God hath concluded them all [Jew- Gentile] in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.” While it's true that God shews mercy to whom he will shew mercy (9:19), it is also true that God wills to shew mercy to them who respond to light. God works within the realm of his righteousness when he hardens those who reject the truth and hold to unrighteousness. The apostle Paul sets forth Pharaoh as an example (9:17).

Paul anticipates that such sovereign behavior by God is bound to raise objections from the natural man (9:19-20). God raised up an recalcitrant Pharaoh by his sovereign will. Yet God was perfectly righteous in holding Pharaoh responsible for his actions. There is no fault to be found with righteous God for his finding of fault with Pharaoh. Paul's argument: “When God does what he wills with a man who rejects his truth and light, he does so righteously.”

We're obligated to handle Paul's potter metaphor in a manner consistent with his aforementioned desire to have mercy upon all men (9:21). Else we have a God who creates robots destined for perdition, men void of will, who lack the ability to react to truth and light, a notion Paul refuted in Romans 1. Jeremiah also employed the potter metaphor (Jeremiah 18:4-6). The elect nation of Israel, a vessel of clay marred in the potter's hand, can be made again into another vessel “as it seemed good to the potter.” The Bible interpreter, in comparing scripture with scripture, will always balance the sovereignty of the potter with his mercy. Clay that is marred in the potter's hand is due to defects in the clay, not a design decision by the potter. By removing defects from the old lump, it becomes a new lump with which the potter works to make another vessel. This fact is often omitted or blurred by Calvinism.

Romans 9:22 sets forth sobering truth. With a proper biblical background established, the verse can be understood in context.

“What if God, willing to shew..” is a conditional statement. The indicative mode requires that we understand “if” as “since”, a fulfilled condition. The verb “willing” is 'thelo' (to desire or intend) as a present active participle. Literal translation: “Since the God, the one who is continually desirous...” God, according to Paul, is one always willing to put on display his wrath (indignation) and to make known his power. Is anyone surprised to learn a holy God would so react to ungodly men who reject him? God “fitted” them with a view to destruction. *Fitted* is 'katartizo' (kata = 'down' + aritzo = 'to render fit, complete') as a perfect passive participle modifying “vessels” (instruments). These vessels of wrath (indignation) are ones having been permanently and completely fitted to destruction.

The question is: When did the fitting out of these vessels take place? Was it before they drew their first breath? Could one walk into a maternity ward and find babies God has already permanently consigned to the Lake of Fire? Scripture demands we understand the irreversible fitting of these vessels of wrath for destruction taking place at some point AFTER they expel the knowledge of God from their thinking AND God gives (abandons) them over to their vices. Contrary to what Calvinism may derive from this text, it does NOT teach the unconditional election of some vessels to be saved and the rest passed over. Paul says God “endured” (carried) these vessels “with much longsuffering.” The word “longsuffering” is 'makrothumia' (makros = 'long' + 'thumia' = 'tempered'). The vessels of wrath are the objects of God's long-temperedness, his long- to-the-boiling-point nature. Although perdition is certain to come, it is slow in coming.

To the degree God is continually desirous to show his wrath and make his power known, to the same extent he desires to make known the riches of his glory upon “the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” (9:23). The verb “afore prepared” is 'proetoimazo' (pro = 'before' + etoimazo = 'to prepare or make ready'). It is a basic aorist (past) tense. The doctrine that corresponds to God preparing vessels of mercy beforehand unto glory is predestination, a truth that applies to believers only as they are in Christ. The Bible knows nothing of unbelievers being predestined. According to scripture, the unbeliever, as long as he is entrenched in unbelief, is (1) already condemned, (2) under the wrath of God, and (3) one who shall never see life (John 3:18,36). There is no way an intellectually honest Bible interpreter can harmonize “prior preparation to glory” with the hopeless state of an unbeliever. It's when an unbeliever becomes a believer in Jesus that prior preparation for glory takes place as a result of predestination. In Ephesians 2:10, the verb translated “afore prepared” in Romans 9:23 is translated “before ordained” in reference to good works. God creates the believer in

Christ Jesus to walk in the good works he before ordained. The vessels of mercy that God afore prepared unto glory were so prepared at the time God created them anew in Christ Jesus. There is nothing in Romans 9 that teaches unconditional election to salvation.

Romans 9:24: “Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” We are presented here with an interpretive challenge. First, Paul identifies with Roman believers by using the pronoun “us.” Secondly, can we assume that EVERY lost individual called by the gospel becomes a believer? The Calvinist has in his quiver of arguments the 'Effectual Call' versus the 'General Call'. He understands the verb “called” to refer to an effectual call. The Biblicist agrees it is effectual. But the big question is: 'What' makes the gospel call effectual?

The Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity (i.e., Total Inability) requires that God regenerate the lost elect man, dead in trespasses and sins, so that he, now being made spiritually alive, can exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Calvinist thus interprets the phrase “whom he hath called” to mean “whom he hath effectually called because he first regenerated them so they could believe.” It is the Irresistible Grace tenet of Calvinism.

The problem with this doctrine is Jesus taught Nicodemus that it is a LOOK of faith that leads to LIFE for sin-bitten humanity (John 3:14-15). In Calvinism, it's LIFE that results in the LOOK of faith. Jesus taught that a LOOK to him in faith produces the new birth. In reverse fashion, Calvinism teaches that sovereign regeneration enables the look of faith. The late Harold Camping, an ardent Calvinist, made this argument to his Open Forum radio program listeners. He claimed God regenerated him before he believed, but could NOT explain when or how it happened. He simply argued that regeneration MUST have taken place else he couldn't have believed. This argument fits perfectly the rationalistic theory of Calvinism, but contradicts the teaching of Christ. The apostle John wrote: “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life” (John 3:36). If Calvinism is correct in its Effectual Call/ Irresistible Grace doctrine, then both Jesus and John got it wrong!

What then makes the gospel call effectual? The answer lies in Hebrews 4:2: “For unto us [believers] was the gospel preached as well as unto them [unbelievers]: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” An effectual gospel call is one that is MIXED WITH FAITH in the hearer! It is the absence of faith that renders the gospel call ineffectual, not an arbitrary choice on God's part NOT to regenerate the lost, leaving them incapable of believing on Christ.

The phrase “whom he hath called” presupposes a faith response in the called. This is entirely consistent with Peter's admonition to make our

“calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). If Calvinism is correct, the lost elect man has NO ability whatsoever to control his calling or election, making them sure. That's the sole business of a sovereign God. Calling and election are virtual synonyms in the NT. Both apply to believers, not unbelievers. Christ was both called (Romans 9:7) and elected (1 Peter 2:4). The student of scripture who begins his study of calling and election with Christ, who was both called and elected, will likely arrive at sound doctrinal conclusions. Calling and election both have to do with the service to which God calls a believer and the privileges God bestows upon him. A doctrinal system that places one's calling and election before faith distorts biblical truth. But that's exactly what Calvinism does with its life-before-look doctrine. In biblical terms, before men are called and elected, they must first experience sanctification of the Spirit and belief of gospel truth (2 Thessalonians 2;13; 1 Peter 1:22).

We have traversed the first twenty-four verses of Romans 9, comparing scripture with scripture, and have found NO biblical basis whatsoever for the doctrines of Unconditional Election or Irresistible Grace. Finding these doctrines in Romans 9 is the fruit of 'private interpretation', a practice the scripture itself disallows (2 Peter 1:20). The text of Romans 9:1-24 is not a standalone, isolated text. Its proper interpretation hinges upon bringing the whole counsel of God to bear, not imposing a Calvinistic template.

Romans 11:1-8

As stated previously, the scope of Gospel Deficiency is limited by design to an analysis of Calvinism as it pertains to the gospel of Christ. Inasmuch as many Calvinists claim to have embraced Calvinism after a reading Romans 9 and 11, we must expand our scope to include references to Election. As we pointed out in our analysis of Romans 9:1-24, we must consider the companion text of Romans 11:1-8 in light of the whole counsel of God, avoiding the 'private interpretation' trap and the imposition of Calvinistic tenets upon the text. It should be noted that an unbiblical view of election is largely responsible for the philosophical speculations of Calvinism. If God arbitrarily elected some sinners to be saved and passed over the rest, then a Particular Atonement on behalf of the so-called 'elect' makes perfect sense. For why should or would Jesus die for those whom he had no intention to save in the first place?

Paul opens Chapter 11 by asking: “Hath God cast away his people?” (11:1). This inquiry comes on the heels of these two conclusions: (1) Gentiles had found God, whom they had previously neither sought nor asked after, and (2) Israel, God's chosen people, continued to languish

in disobedience and denial despite God's standing invitation ("all day long") for them to come unto him. Perish the thought, Paul says! He cites his own pedigree and salvation as evidence that God has NOT cast away his people. He then makes this assertion: "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (11:2). The fact that God set his affection on Israel and elected them to be the conduit through which the Lord Jesus would come into the world did not guarantee the salvation of a single Israelite. God foreknew Israel. Yet many of the foreknown on the national level would perish on the personal level. Paul was an exception.

Paul proceeds to draw a parallel between himself and Elijah. He was not alone in his Christian faith any more than Elijah was alone. "Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 'Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life'" (11:2-3). Paul continues: "But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal" (11:4). The questions that arise are: Was it God's reserving of these seven thousand individuals that accounted for their refusal to bow the knee to Baal? What does it mean for God to "reserve" folks? Is the verb "reserved" here synonymous with "elected"? If so, to what were those seven thousand men elected? Does it mean that God intended to save ONLY seven thousand from the entire nation?

The verb "reserved" is 'kataleipo' (kata = "down" + leipo = "to leave"). It means "to leave, leave behind or abandon." In its twenty-five NT usages, it is translated "leave" (22x), "forsake" (2x) and "reserve" (1x). The aorist (past) tense with the reflexive "to myself" indicates personal action that goes beyond a mere leaving behind. The use of "remnant" in 11:5 demands the stronger "reserved" translation. It is NEVER translated "elected" or as any equivalent. Its contextual usage in Romans 11, however, does create a strong association with election. There are two phrases in our text that lend themselves to a proper interpretation. The first is "who have not bowed the knee to Baal." The second is "the election hath obtained it." Bowing the knee to Baal is an act of worship and service. The seven thousand men God reserved to himself, by implication, bowed the knee to the One true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even as Elijah properly worshiped and served the One true God, so also did the seven thousand men. Elijah was not alone. Election in the scripture ALWAYS has reference to service, not personal salvation, In the one place where Paul said the Thessalonian believers were "chosen to salvation", the context clearly teaches the salvation in view is deliverance from the Day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation. The

conditions that made this privilege of deliverance possible were "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). No man is ever elected (chosen) until he hears the Spirit's voice and believes the gospel. Election is one of the many "spiritual blessings" that one must be "in Christ" to enjoy (Ephesians 1:3). For these seven thousand men, who remained faithful in their worship and service, they were first elected to perform that service and reserved as a result of their faithfulness.

Paul affirms there is a remnant today as there was in Elijah's day (11:5-6). God is still in the reservation business. The "election of grace" accounts for the remnant. In 11:6, Paul painstakingly juxtaposes the concepts of "grace" and "works" as he did in 3:2628, 4:4-5 and 4:16. The election of grace has faith as its operative principle or entry point. Paul stated: "It is OF FAITH that it might be BY GRACE" (4:16). In contrast to the false assertions of Calvinism, grace and faith are NOT mutually exclusive. Faith on the part of the sinner is absolutely essential for grace to work. Scripture teaches the mutual exclusivity of GRACE and WORKS, not grace and faith. A fatal flaw of Calvinism is reckoning faith as a work when scripture clearly distinguishes between the two. Faith depicts the sinner approaching a Holy God with empty hands, acknowledging his total dependence upon the WORK Christ accomplished on his behalf. Faith is full acknowledgment of the futility of works. Calvinists are bound by their rationalistic system of thought to misconstrue faith as work. Grace and faith are biblical friends. Grace and works are not. Grace works through faith.

Calvinists often accuse those that reject the Five Points as being opponents of grace. Such is not the case. Opponents of the Five Points readily acknowledge that: (1) no lost man ever seeks after God unless drawn by grace through the Spirit, and (2) it is grace that enables a lost man to believe on Christ. Salvation begins with grace and ends with grace. It's ALL of grace! But scripture teaches God's saving grace needs faith to make it operative. Grace looks for faith! One main difference between the Calvinist and the Biblicist is the insistence by the Calvinist that grace is irresistible, that regeneration of the elect by grace prior to faith makes faith in Christ inevitable. The Biblicist follows the teachings of Jesus, John and Paul, insisting that God regenerates lost men in response to faith in Christ, a faith that's impossible apart from God's drawing grace. In this regard, Calvinism treats its 'elect' no differently than a vending machine of bottled sodas wherein God inserts a dollar bill of regeneration, pushes a button and waits for faith to come forth. The election of grace is inclusive of faith and exclusive of works. Failure to acknowledge this biblical distinction results in the theological train wreck called Calvinism.

The phrase “the election hath obtained it” is critical to understanding the passage. Notice that Paul does NOT say: “The election WILL obtain it.” That's what he might have said IF the Unconditional Election doctrine of Calvinism is the correct theological view. The verb “obtained” is 'epilygchano' (epi=”upon” + lygchano=”to chance, attain, obtain”). In every NT usage (5x), it's translated “obtain.” Paul uses the aorist (past) tense for both “Israel” and “Election.” The former had not [yet] obtained what they were seeking for; the latter had obtained it. We add 'yet' because Paul uses the present tense to describe the seeking of Israel, signifying that, at the time Paul wrote Romans, Israel as a nation was STILL seeking God's righteousness, but had yet to obtain it. The righteousness of God is obtainable ONLY by faith (Romans 10:31-32). As part of the present-day remnant, Paul had obtained it. Therefore a member of the “Israel” class could STILL become a member of the “Election” class by believing on Jesus Christ, as did Paul. The groups “Israel” and “Election” are not static or fixed. They are dynamic (in flux) at any given moment in time.

This truth is apparent from the singular form of “election.” The election is a snapshot in time. But at any given moment, whether it consists of one million or ten million chosen vessels, it remains ONE elected body. If Calvinism is correct, there are many members of the election that have not yet obtained to the righteousness that comes by faith. But scripture teaches that ALL the elect have found and obtained to the righteousness of God. That's why no one can lay a charge against God's elect, ALL of whom are justified (Romans 8:33). The number (size) of the election can and does grow daily. But regardless of its number, it's ONE elected body, a snapshot, at any given moment in time.

The phrase “the rest were blinded” requires analysis. The verb “blinded” (Gk. 'poroo') means “to make stony, to make dull or hard, to callus”. It is passive in voice, which means their hearts were made callused by an outside influence. It is the word Mark used in 6:52 when describing how the disciples were “hardened” (or callused) because they failed to consider the miracle of the loaves earlier that day. Question: Is God the source of Israel's blindness, or were they blinded (callused) by their own failure to consider the claims of Christ? It is abundantly clear God has given Israel the spirit of slumber (11:8). Based on the usage of 'poroo', however, the callusing that unbelief produces is not necessarily permanent. Even as those callused disciples became ardent followers of Jesus Christ, even so can blinded Israelites find the righteousness of God they seek for through proper consideration of the gospel. A blinded Israelite, if the Spirit of God breaks through the calluses, can believe the gospel, obtain to God's righteousness by faith, and become a member of the election. This

blindness “in part” is not necessarily a permanent condition. The apostle Paul is the prime example!
The scripture knows nothing of a lost elect man. A strict Calvinist interpretation of Romans 11:1-8, and imposition of a Calvinist template, convolutes the text. The doctrines of Calvinism simply CANNOT be supported from Romans 9-11 based on exegetical, contextual and expository treatment of the text. Bottom line: If you're IN CHRIST by virtue of grace operating through faith, you are elected IN HIM to serve God and equipped BY HIM with the spiritual gift(s) necessary to perform the service to which God called and elected you.

An Analysis of Acts 13:48

One of the many passages or 'proof texts' of Calvinism is found in Acts 13:48: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” The purpose of this chapter of Gospel Deficiency is to examine this verse in its CONTEXT in order to arrive at the proper meaning of the text. The reader will discover what it means to be ordained to eternal life. It does NOT mean what Calvinism alleges it means. We will look at the Acts 13 context in three separate sections in hopes they'll provide a cohesive whole.

Continuing in the Grace of God

The word of exhortation delivered by Paul to those gathered in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia contains many of the essential elements of apostolic preaching (Acts 13:14-52). There was the historical linkage that began with the fathers (13:17), transitioned through Egypt and the wilderness (13:17-18), brought Israel into the land of promise (13:19), led to the Judges and Samuel (13:20), and then king David (13:22), from whose seed he raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus (13:23). This Jesus is portrayed as the One in whom there was no cause of death, but crucified nonetheless by an elect nation that condemned him (13:27-28). In so doing, they fulfilled the prophetic scriptures by nailing him to a tree (13:29). But God raised him from the dead (13:30).
According to Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ had now become the basis for forgiveness of sins (13:38). It is worth nothing that this synagogue crowd consisted of both Jews and Gentiles, all of which were recipients of the word of salvation (13:26). Paul clearly believed that the death of Christ was inclusive of all men without exception or distinction. If Paul had believed in a limited atonement,

there is no way (with good conscience) he could have preached the forgiveness of sins to every man in that synagogue. But when Paul preached the cross, he made a universal application of its merits, and excluded no one in his appeal! If the cross and empty tomb do not represent hope and good news for every sinner, then who can know with certainty (apart from a subjective experience) whether there is a value in that cross for them?

There are two observations to be made from our text. The first is from Paul's opening remarks, and the second from Paul's interaction with the hearers after the meeting broke up. Both of them provide valuable insight into the mind of Paul regarding his perspective on grace.

In his introduction, Paul referred to his audience as "Men of Israel, and ye that fear God" (13:16). Mid-way through his message, he addressed them as "children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God" (13:26). Now, this is the same man who wrote: "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). Is Paul contradicting himself? What could have caused Paul to attribute the fear of God to men in this crowd and deny it to the entire race of sinners in his epistle to the
Romans?

The answer lies in what Paul immediately perceived as he sized up the congregation prior to speaking—the grace of God was at work in Antioch of Pisidia long before he arrived! God's drawing grace alone could account for both Jewish and Gentile hearts ready to receive the Word with reverence and awe. And as the apostle to the Gentiles, it must have thrilled Paul's heart to see so many Gentiles hungering for the truth of God. This was grace at work...and the Gentiles were in the midst of it!

The second observation finds these same God-fearing Gentiles begging for another dose of the gospel on the next Sabbath day (13:42-43). This is grace in durative action. God prepared their hearts before Paul came on the scene, and continued to stir their souls by his Spirit regarding his Son after the preaching had ended. Many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who "persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." Paul was aware of what God was up to with his grace, and convinced these men that they should remain open to the truth they had heard until it bore the fruit of salvation in their souls!

Now, we can call this grace of God drawing grace, illuminating grace, or quickening grace (that awakens the soul that is dead in trespasses and sins to the light of gospel truth so that the will is able to respond to it in faith). Paul discerned the work of God in their midst, but also realized it was possible for them to discontinue the journey toward gospel truth, and frustrate the grace of God.

The manner in which Paul dealt with these men is totally inconsistent with the philosophical notions of Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace. If Paul had been a “sovereign grace” preacher, as some have mislabeled him, he would have been content to let God regenerate his elect without regard for their continuance in grace or the lack thereof. In fact, the seekers would have had no choice in the matter. But Paul appealed to them as one who knew they had a responsibility to cooperate with the grace of God, knowing that eternal danger was close at hand for those who rejected the work of grace (13:40-41).

During my years as a pastor, I witnessed on many occasions the grace of God working in the hearts of lost sinners. They would often come back to church Sunday after Sunday with an apparent hunger for the truth. It was always my prayer that they would continue in the grace of God. During visits to their homes I would try to encourage them to do so. At times I would say, “The church cannot get you to heaven, but it’s a great place to catch the bus that can.” The metaphorical bus of which I spoke is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's admonition for them to “continue in the grace of God” was a recognition that God was at work, that his drawing grace had brought them to the synagogue to hear the word of the gospel.

Ordained to Eternal Life (Part 1)

When we last left the apostle Paul in Antioch of Pisidia, he and Barnabas had persuaded many of the Jews and religious proselytes to continue in the grace of God. If Paul had been carrying a DayMinder business calendar, he might have already flipped over to the page for the next Sabbath day, and penciled in: “Preach again at synagogue by popular demand! God is moving!” These men had issued a bona fide invitation to Paul and his team, and the invite was accepted. So, like yeast in a batch of bread dough, the gospel of forgiveness through faith in Jesus—the One who died and rose again for Jews and Gentiles alike—had seven days to permeate the city. ..and permeate it did!

Think for a moment about the conversations that must have taken place that week at the work place, in the houses of friends as they visited, around dinner tables, and between attendees of the previous meeting who occasioned to meet. Those that took place between Gentiles must have been especially riveting. They were no doubt overwhelmed by the fact that a merciful God had included them in the offering up of his Son for the sins of the world. No more outcasts! No longer strangers to the promises! No longer relegated to proselyte status! It was an open door afforded to them by grace to stand justified by faith before a Holy God, and on equal footing with the

Jews! Oh, that gospel must have been to them like a river of refreshing water in the midst of a dry and thirsty land. It is inconceivable to me that those Gentiles who heard it could have kept silent for a full week. By the way, how is it that we who have tasted grace of God are able to keep silent?

Luke tells us that almost the whole city came together on the next Sabbath day to hear the Word of God (Acts 13:44). That phrase does indeed make the case for permeation! A key omission is any mention of the synagogue. Since the entire city (minus a citizen or two) showed up, the meeting was most likely held outdoors. It's always a sure sign of God's grace and power at work when the gospel message actually breaks out from behind the meeting place walls and into the streets of the city!

The Jews did not respond well to this break out (13:45). I can see them leaving home for the synagogue as they had done many times before, expecting one more time to hear the itinerant Jewish evangelist speak of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. Upon their arrival at the meeting place, they were "filled with envy" when they saw the multitudes (plural) of Gentiles that had congregated. God was on the scene, and had messed up their solemn and predictable routine. I suppose what really stuck in their craw was the fact that God was extending his grace to Gentiles, and willing to by-pass "the chosen" in the process. So envy in the heart transformed these previously respectful men into blaspheming combatants. In my mind, the blasphemy was an accusation that Paul was speaking lies and operating under the power of Satan. There is no greater crime against heaven than that of standing between a lost sinner and the gospel that can save his or her soul!

Paul and Barnabas responded boldly to the verbal attacks (13:46-47). First, they affirmed the primacy of preaching to the Jews. It was necessary as a matter of election. Jesus had come to his chosen people even though they received him not. Secondly, they pulled no punches in spelling out what the Jews were in the process of doing—rejecting the Word of the very God they claimed to worship! Thirdly, they pronounced a self-imposed sentence upon the Jews—unworthy of everlasting life! God imposes such a sentence on those who impose it upon themselves! Eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ was theirs for the believing, but they chose to remain in unbelief. Fourthly, they informed the Jews that they could expect to see more of the same with respect to the Gentiles and salvation.

Those words reassured the Gentiles concerning God's good grace toward them (13:48). They were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. Expositor G. Campbell Morgan is correct when he states: "The word ordained

has no reference whatsoever to any act of God" (The Acts of The Apostles, p. 334). He further cites the rendering of Rotherham's Emphasized Bible, which reads: "They that were disposed to eternal life." Any Greek lexicon will confirm that "to dispose" is a perfectly legitimate meaning of the Greek word. Nothing in Luke's inspired record suggests an act of Divine election that took place before the world began. The context makes absolutely clear what ordained (disposed) them to life eternal. It was the Word of God working on their open minds and hearts as they continued in the grace of God!

A week of continuance in grace had finally turned desire into disposition, and faith in Jesus was the result! The unbelieving Jews might have been ordained in like manner if they had continued in the same grace. But envy born of prejudice cut that continuance short, and sealed their eternal fate. Thanks be unto God for his matchless grace!

Ordained to Eternal Life (Part 2)

Let us contemplate for a few moments the power of the word of God to radically and permanently change the dispositions of those to whom it is preached. One of the many biblical illustrations of this truth took place in the synagogue at Antioch during the second missionary journey of the apostle Paul (Acts 13:14-52). After reading the law and prophets, Paul and his company were asked by the rulers of the synagogue to share any word of exhortation they might have for the people (13:15). In response to their gracious offer (and no doubt recognizing the providential hand of God), Paul stood up, and respectfully requested that the congregation give audience to what they were about to hear (13:16). Paul proceeded to deliver an historical and prophetical masterpiece.

He began his message with the captivity of Israel in Egypt. He cited the forty years of wilderness wanderings, the conquest of Canaan, the four hundred-fifty year era of the judges, the work of Samuel the prophet, the kingships of Saul and David, and the preaching of John before the coming of Jesus—the Saviour of Israel, and the fulfillment of all the promises made to David. He recounted the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus at the hands of the Jews at Jerusalem, and concluded with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead as the fulfillment of the promises made unto the fathers.

It is worth noting this word of exhortation delivered by Paul was also referred to as the word of this salvation (13:26), the word of God (13:43, 46), and the word of the Lord (13:48, 49). His final admonition consisted of three unambiguous assertions: through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins (13:38); by him all

that believe are justified (13:39); beware of despising the message of salvation in Jesus (13:40-41).

The disposition of the Jews toward the word of God stands in stark contrast to that of the Gentiles. The Jews were filled with envy at the Gentile multitudes, and spoke contradictory and blasphemous words against the word of God. Paul boldly accused them of putting it away, and judging themselves unworthy of everlasting life. The Gentiles, on the other hand, desired for these words to be preached to them again the next Sabbath day. They responded with gladness to the fact that God was offering to them the same forgiveness of sins, justification (righteous standing before Him), and eternal life. They glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

The word “ordained” is from the Greek word 'tasso'. It can have a range of meanings depending on the context in which it is used, including to arrange (in an orderly manner), to place (in order), to dispose (to a certain position or lot), to addict, and to determine. The verb form is a perfect passive participle, which tells us that this ordination to eternal life was of a permanent nature, that it came upon them from an outside source, and that it took place prior to (and as a condition for) the exercise of faith.

Our task is three-fold: (1) to determine the sense (meaning) of ordained as it is used here, (2) to identify the source, and (3) to ascertain the time at which it took place. The context enables us to achieve all three objectives, especially since Luke takes great care to represent eternal life as a genuine offer made by God to all men without exception or distinction, and faith as the condition upon which God justifies sinners, whether Jew or Gentile.

The clear meaning of 'ordained' in this context is that the Gentiles had become permanently disposed toward eternal life due to the effect of the word of God upon them. The hunger to hear and a continuance in the grace of God resulted in an addiction to those things that pertain to eternal life, and a resolute determination to trust in Jesus to receive the benefits of salvation. There is nothing in the context to suggest an act of God in eternity past. The believing Gentiles were ordained (disposed) to eternal life in an historical context after hearing the word of salvation and before they believed. The unbelieving Jews had every opportunity to be ordained to eternal life, but chose rather to reject the word of the Lord. The standard interpretation of Acts 13:48 by Calvinists is nothing more a violation of its context in search of a prooftext.

The disposition of the Gentiles to eternal life holds two great lessons for us. First, it confirms that one's response to the word of God is the critical difference between Heaven and Hell. Secondly, it defines that

disposition of soul that leads to saving faith. And that disposition (ordination) to eternal life is what happens when a sinner who continues in the grace of God ultimately becomes a believer.

The World Reconciled

The gospel of Jesus Christ, as we have painstakingly pointed out, is a coin with two sides. One side of the gospel coin is the PROVISION side, the good news that God in Christ has provided a remedy for our sins. The other side of the gospel coin is the APPROPRIATION side, the good news that God in Christ has provided for sinners the means to appropriate the sin remedy by a simple look of faith to the One Who died for them and rose again the third day. The provision side is encapsulated in: “Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Those scriptures would most certainly include Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

We have also pointed out that Calvinism, in gospel-deficient fashion, is philosophically bound to limit the gospel to one side of that coin, the appropriation side. For the Calvinist, the gospel essentially consists in one scripture: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). Now there's absolutely nothing wrong with declaring that promise of appropriation to a sinner. Here's the problem: A sinner CANNOT appropriate what God has not provided! If Calvinism's theory of Limited Atonement (or Particular Redemption) is true, then there are some for whom God made no provision for sin in the death of his Son. Therefore the promise of appropriation given in Acts 16:31 CANNOT apply to them. If Jesus did not die for your sins, God CANNOT save you despite ANY attempt on your part to appropriate salvation. No provision, no appropriation...period. This is not rocket science.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, the apostle Paul wrote in eloquent terms about the two sides of reconciliation. In this passage we find yet again another truth that totally destroys the entire system of Calvinism. Paul writes: “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (5:14). With the phrase “we thus judge”, Paul employs basic yet unassailable logic pertaining to the death of Christ. His argument is based on an Unlimited or Universal Atonement. “If one died for all, then were all dead.” Can we agree that the first “all” and the second “all” both refer to the same group of people? Paul certainly thought so. Intellectual honesty demands it. If the Calvinist chooses to limit the first “all” to “all of the elect”, then he must also argue that the second “all” does as well. In

other words, if Christ died for the elect only, then only the elect were spiritually dead. It is clear that Paul did NOT subscribe to a Limited Atonement. He was NOT a five-pointer, as I have heard some Calvinists ludicrously argue.

The verb “constraineth” means “to hold together” (so that nothing falls away from the whole). The idea of compression or pressure is in view. The verb was used to describe the constraint that farmers would apply to their animals in order to administer medications. Paul uses the present tense to convey continuous, ongoing action. The love that constantly motivated the apostle and his co-laborers was that shown by Christ in his death for ALL, for EVERY sinner, for ALL who fell with Adam when he sinned.

The phrase “we thus judge” is an aorist active participle; literally translated, “ones having judged” or “ones having come to a reasoned conclusion.” There was no theological debate among the apostles about the scope of Christ's death. That issue was settled. It was fundamental to the gospel. One cannot limit the atonement without limiting the gospel, which is why Calvinism, or Reformed Theology, is gospel-deficient. No preacher of a Limited Atonement has any right to call himself a gospel preacher. He is, in fact, a half-gospel preacher, bidding lost men to appropriate a salvation for which God may or may not have made provision. But this is exactly what many seminary Presidents and professors are training their students to do. Why not call them half-gospel seminaries and be theologically consistent and intellectually honest?

The verbs “one died” and “all were dead” are both aorist active in tense. The aorist tense is punctiliar and signifies a point in time. A literal translation of “then were all dead” is “then all died.” It is a reference to the point in time at which humanity died spiritually, not necessarily to their subsequent spiritual state. That point in time is determinable by Romans 5:12: “Wherefore as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned.” The verbs “death passed” and “all have sinned” are both aorist active tenses. The phrase “all have sinned” is literally “all sinned” at a point in time. When Adam disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden tree, ALL of humanity sinned with him. As a consequence, death passed, at the same point in time, upon ALL of humanity. All men sinned and all men died in Adam. Christ died for all of them.

Paul's entire gospel enterprise was driven by the reasoned conclusion that Christ had died for ALL who died in Adam. In order for the Calvinist to argue for a Limited Atonement, he must of necessity argue that only the elect sinned with Adam. You'd have to question the right-mindedness of any man that would attempt to make that

argument. Expositor R. C. H. Lenski is spot on when he writes: "The Calvinistic efforts to limit this word to 'all of the elect' constitute one of the saddest chapters in exegesis. The scriptures shine with the 'all' of universality, but Calvinists do not see it. Their one effort is to find something that would justify them to reduce 'all' to 'some'." Lenski adds: "The real assurance for me that Christ died for me is this alone, that he died for absolutely all" (Interpretation of I & II Corinthians, p. 1029).

“Reconcile” is the verb 'katallasso', meaning “to bring into equal value or exchange two entities that were at variance.” The word was used of coin exchanges where equal value was in view. Paul said: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (5:19). That is, on the PROVISION side of the gospel, God did his part in dealing with our trespasses. The atoning blood of Christ was the propitiation (satisfaction) for the sins of humanity. Our sins were dealt with in full.

Sinful men are admonished: “Be ye reconciled to God” (5:20). The verb is passive voice, which signifies that sinners must allow themselves to BE reconciled by God. God does all the reconciling. Man does not and cannot reconcile himself to God. Sinners must be MADE the righteousness of God in Christ (5:21). It takes God's perfect righteousness to reconcile a sinful man who is at variance with God. When a man submits himself to the gospel, which is the APPROPRIATION side, he simply comes to the Father through the Son with empty hands, confessing that Christ is Lord and trusting Jesus to perform the work of salvation, doing for the sinner what he cannot do for himself. Faith is NOT a work. Saving faith is the appropriation of the great reconciliatory work that God performed in Christ on the sinner's behalf. If God did not PROVIDE it, the sinner cannot APPROPRIATE it!

The Saviour of All Men

One of the admirable traits of the apostle Paul was his ability to communicate the gospel effectively to every strata of society, and to accommodate every intellectual level. During a visit to Athens, as recorded in Acts 17:16-34, he went toe-to-toe with the philosophical heavyweights in the midst of Mars’ Hill. He had been summoned by both Epicureans (the hedonists) and Stoicks (the fatalists) to explain in further detail the strange resurrection doctrine he was disseminating in the synagogue, and daily in the marketplace.

He employed the altar inscription TO THE UNKNOWN GOD as an introduction, and argued convincingly that the days of superstitious and ignorant worship were henceforth inexcusable! God, who had

winked at (overlooked) such idolatrous behavior in times past as an expression of compassion toward the ignorant, was now commanding all men every where to repent.

The content of Paul's message to the Athenians (17:22-31) is full of theological gems worthy of an entire volume of exposition. We only have the space here to offer a few brief remarks regarding two of its phrases. The first is "all men every where" (17:30), an all-inclusive phrase that describes both the target audience of the gospel and the extent of the atonement. In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). If God has an expressed desire for every soul to hear the gospel, then there must be a corresponding value in the atonement as a basis for the offer of forgiveness and life for those who repent and believe. If the resurrection of Christ impacts all men every where with an assurance of judgment to come, then the death of Christ brings the corresponding assurance that the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6), and has borne the judgment of all.

Paul preached that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (I Corinthians 15:3). Paul could make that assertion with absolute assurance whether he was addressing a congregation of five thousand or evangelizing a single lost soul in one-on- one personal work. Paul proclaimed the message of repentance to all men every where because Christ had died for the sins of all men every where! Those who have a problem looking into the eyes of a lost sinner and saying confidently, "Christ died for our sins—yours, mine, and those of the whole world " probably have a different gospel than that which Paul preached!

The second is "that man whom he hath ordained" (17:31). The scriptures teach us that Jesus is both God and Man. As God in the flesh, he is fully qualified to judge the quick and the dead. In this message, however, Paul places the emphasis upon Jesus the Man, and the fact that all men every where shall be judged by another man.

The man Christ Jesus, however, was unique among men. He was conceived in the womb of a virgin. As the risen and glorified Son of God, he is the one Mediator between God and men (I Timothy 2:5). As our Mediator, he was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). He is a High Priest Who was touched by the feelings of our infirmities; who was in all points like as we are, yet without sin (4:15). He was taken from among men and ordained for men so that he might have compassion on the ignorant, inasmuch as he himself also was compassed with infirmity (Hebrews 5:1-2). He learned obedience by the things that he suffered, and finished His course as the perfect man and author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (5:8-9). Jesus, the Mediatory Man, has an

eternal and unchangeable priesthood. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and higher than the heavens (7:24-26). This is the Man before whom all men every where shall one day stand to give an account.

Brethren, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ distinguishes the Christian faith from all other religions. It authenticates every word that proceeded from His lips as being the truth. It proves that He spoke the truth, lived the truth, and is the absolute embodiment of truth! His resurrection exposes every other religious system for what it is—a lie! He is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe! He is the Man whom God has ordained, who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them! Amen!

Liberty In Sovereignty

It is entirely biblical and proper for us to think of God Almighty as sovereign. Almightiness is the sister of sovereignty. These two kindred virtues imply that God reigns supreme in his universe, and possesses the wherewithal to impose his will upon it. But sovereignty—if that concept is allowed to have its biblical range of meaning— implies that the God who is able to impose his will upon every facet of creation is also at liberty to withhold at will the imposition of his will without compromising his sovereignty. Theologians who refuse to grant God this liberty in sovereignty create for themselves a quagmire of contradiction, and will (in many cases) resort to demagoguery and insult toward those who do.

Perhaps the focal point for any discussion about the sovereignty of God should be the cross upon which Jesus died. In his infinite wisdom and power, God imposed his redemptive will upon this world without violating the will of any man. As Peter stated in his masterful message at Pentecost: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). In no way did (or does) God impose wickedness upon the hands of any man—including Judas Iscariot!

So how do we reconcile the realities of a determinate counsel and wicked hands? Some argue that a sovereign God predetermined the wickedness of those murderous hands, but such an allegation clearly indicts God as the author of sin. It is enough to classify that mystery under “unsearchable judgments” and “ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33). The cross is indeed the wonder of historical wonders. A sovereign God in human flesh yielded himself to the will of sinful men and simultaneously executed his own sovereign will in providing a way of redemption for those who crucified him— including us!

The cross of Christ resolved perhaps the greatest dilemma that sovereign God ever encountered, and that is how he could justify sinners (i.e., declare them righteous) and at the same time deal righteously with their sin. To put it in laypersons terms, there was no way God could get sinners OFF the hook without first putting someone else ON the hook for their sins. Therefore the gospel entails the following declaration: "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). Just and Justifier! What a truth! Nothing less than the death of God Incarnate could keep his righteousness in tact as he went about the business of justifying believers! So the Father made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The righteousness of God that comes to the sinner by faith in Jesus Christ is "unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23). The design of the prepositions unto and upon is clear. Jesus became a sin offering for all who have sinned, and offers the gift of righteousness unto all for whom he died. But his righteousness only abides upon those who believe the gospel. Thus sovereign God chose to make a distinction between his righteous provision for sin and the appropriation of righteousness by the sinner. That is, God, as an expression of his sovereignty, does withhold the imposition of his will in the matter of personal salvation. Do sinners have the ability to believe the gospel apart from the drawing grace of God? Absolutely not! Can sinners resist and ultimately reject God's drawing grace? Yes, they can! God by his sovereign choice has made it so!

In his discourse with Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus clearly distinguished between the provision for salvation and its appropriation (John 3:14-15). Moses lifted up a brass serpent as the remedy for every snake-bitten Israelite. The look of faith brought healing and life. But 23,000 died for lack of faith despite God's provision. Likewise the death of Jesus provided a sin satisfaction for the whole world (1 John 2:2), but men for whom Christ died continue to perish for lack of appropriation. Our Lord taught that faith precedes regeneration in the order of salvation, just as looking upon the serpent brought preservation of life to snake-bitten Israelites. Jesus taught a look- and-live salvation. The live-and-look heresy of Calvinism (i.e., sovereign regeneration that has faith as its fruit) is one of the many examples of sovereignty run amuck.

For centuries theologians have bandied about the doctrine of God's sovereignty. For many it has become a line drawn in the doctrinal

sand. In affirming the sovereignty of God, however, we must abide by the context of scripture. In Genesis, the Lord proffered acceptance to Cain if he would “do well” in making the proper approach to him. A sovereign God reiterated his inflexible standard of acceptance while refusing to impose life, faith and obedience upon Cain. By granting to God a liberty in sovereignty, as exhibited with Cain and elsewhere in scripture, we can avoid the regeneration- before-faith doctrinal ditch.

Section III: James White on John 3:14-18: An Analysis

Dr. James White is the Director of Alpha & Omega Ministries—an organization dedicated to the defense of Reformation Theology and Christian apologetics in general. Years ago White published an online article entitled "Blinded By Tradition: An Open Letter to Dave Hunt" with the byline "Regarding His Newly Published Attack Upon the Reformation, What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God." In his book, Dave Hunt cited several passages from The Potter's Freedom, a work by James White.

The Open Letter is essentially a response from James White to Dave Hunt challenging his assertions and conclusions. Our purpose in this document is to offer an analysis of the exegesis of John 3:14-18 as published by White. I have included below that section of his remarks verbatim with comments as end notes. The entire letter (if still posted) may be found at White's website: http: //www. aomin. org.

Dave Hunt does not attack the Reformation as alleged by White. If that were true, he would be guilty of attacking the doctrine of justification by faith. Hunt rather challenges the TULIP philosophy espoused by John Calvin and his theological successors. It must be remembered the Reformation was just that—a reformation. It was in no way a total return to New Testament Christianity as revealed in the book of Acts, as Calvinists would have us believe.

James White is a true defender of Christianity and justification by faith. My analysis of his exegetical remarks is not an attempt to denigrate a good man, but to demonstrate how even a highly-intelligent individual can be “carried away” with error and fall into the philosophical trap that Calvinism represents. White is a self-proclaimed expert in the Greek language, and often accuses his theological opponents of "lacking exegetical capacity." After reading my End Notes analysis, readers will be able to discern his exegetical bias in defense of Calvinism. Rather than taking the position of prosecutor in proving a limited atonement, he assumes the role of defense counsel in seeking to introduce 'reasonable doubt' into the

universal scope of John 3:16 by means of faux exegesis, which is actually eisegesis The excerpt from White's Open Letter, the object of this analysis, begins below.

Open Letter Excerpt
John 3:16 Freed From Tradition

"Dave, I think we can agree on the fact that you believe your interpretation of John 3:16 is the key to the entire controversy. Note I said your interpretation. I do not get the idea that you realize that your view is not the only possible way of reading the words of the Lord Jesus, nor, to be honest, do I get the feeling that you have engaged in the task of exegeting even John 3:16. It is your tradition to interpret it in a particular fashion. [Note 1] That tradition includes two very important elements: 1) the idea that “world” means every single individual person, so that God loves each person equally (resulting in a denial of any particularity in God’s love, even in His redemptive love), and 2) that the term “whosoever” includes within its meaning a denial of particularity or election. [Note 2] Your assumption of these ideas underlies pretty much the entirety of your book. Before I chose to write you this open letter, I began an article on John 3:16 and Acts 13:48. I only completed the first section of the exegesis of John 3:16, and was about to address your statements about my allegedly “twisting” the passage, so I will insert what I wrote here, and pick up with the letter itself on the other side...

"Sometimes the passages we know best we know least. That is, when we hear a passage repeated in a particular context over and over and over again, we tend to lose sight of its real meaning in its original setting. This is surely the case with John 3:16, for it is one of the most commonly cited passages in evangelical preaching. And yet, how often is it actually subjected to exegesis? Hardly ever. Its meaning is assumed rather than confirmed. I would like to offer a brief exegesis of the passage and a confirming cross-reference to a parallel passage in John’s first epistle.

Exegesis

"We are uncertain just where in this passage the words of the Lord Jesus end, and John's begin. Opinions differ. But as John did not believe it necessary to indicate any break, we do not need to be concerned about it. In either case the words flow naturally from the discussion Jesus begins with Nicodemus concerning what it means to

be born again, or from above. But as every text without a context is merely a pretext, note the preceding verses:

14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

Jesus hearkens back to the incident in the wilderness (Numbers 21:5ff) where the Lord provided a means of healing to the people of Israel. It goes without saying that the serpent was 1) not something the people would have chosen, given that their affliction was being brought on through serpents; [Note 3] 2) only a means of deliverance for a limited population (i.e., the Jews, not for any outside that community); [Note 4] and 3) was limited in its efficaciousness to those who a) were bitten, b) knew it and recognized it, and c) in faith looked upon the means God had provided for healing. [Note 5] This historical event in the history of Israel (one that would be well known to Nicodemus) is made the type that points, if only as a shadow, to the greater fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Son of Man was lifted up (on the cross) as God's means of redemption. Faith is expressed by looking in obedience on the Godgiven means of salvation.
The phrase "whoever believes" in verse 15 is 'hina pas ho pisteuwn', which is directly parallel to the same phrase in verse 16 [in fact, the parallel of the first part of the phrase led, in later manuscripts, and in fact in the Majority Text type, to the harmonization of verse 15 with 16, resulting in the expansion of the original. The NASB, however, reflects the more accurate textual reading, "so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life" or "so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life."]. [Note 6] The English term "whoever" is meant to communicate "all without distinction in a particular group," specifically, "those who believe." 'Pas' means "all" and 'ho pisteuwn' is "the one(s) believing," hence, "every one believing," leading to "whoever believes." It should be remembered that there is no specific word for "whoever" in the Greek text: this comes from the joining of "all" with "the one believing," i.e., "every one believing." The point is that all the ones believing have eternal life. There is no such thing as a believing person who will not receive the promised benefit, hence, "whosoever." This is a common form in John's writings. For example, in his first epistle he uses it often. Just a few examples:

“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices (Greek: 'pas ho poiwn') righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29).

One could translate the above phrase as "whoever" or "whosoever

practices righteousness." Likewise:

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves (Greek: 'pas ho agapwn') is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

Likewise one could use "whoever" here as in ""whoever loves is born of God," etc. And a final relevant example:

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him” (1 John 5:1).

Here, because the phrase begins the sentence, it is normally rendered by "whoever," since "everyone" does not "flow" as well. So this passage could be rendered "Everyone who is believing." In each case we see the point being made: the construction pas + articular present nominative singular participle means "all the ones, in particular, doing the action of the participle, i.e., whoever is doing the action of the participle." What we can determine without question is that the phrase does not in any way introduce some kind of denial of particularlity to the action. That is, the action of the participle defines the group that is acting. The "whoever" does not expand the horizon of the action beyond the limitation of the classification introduced by the participle. This will become important in examining the next section of verses.

16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Verse 16 begins with the assertion that God's love is the basis of His redemptive work in Jesus Christ. God's love for the world comes to expression in the sending of His unique Son into the world, and in the provision of eternal life for a specific and limited group. The same delineation and particularity that is found in the last phrase of v. 15 is repeated here.
For a discussion of the meaning of only-begotten Son, or much better, unique Son, see The Forgotten Trinity, pp. 201-203.
The text's meaning is transparent, though again, the challenge is hearing the text outside of pre-existing traditions. "So" is best understood as "in this manner" or "to this extent" rather than the common "sooooo much." [Note 7] His love is shown, illustrated, or

revealed in His giving of His Son. The Incarnation is an act of grace, but that Incarnation is never seen separately from the purpose of Christ in coming into the world, specifically, providing redemption through faith in Him. Hence, the love of God is demonstrated in the giving of Christ so as to bring about the eternal life of believers. [Note 8]

The Meaning and Extent of kosmos

"The great controversy that rages around the term 'world' is wholly unnecessary. The wide range of uses of 'kosmos' (world) in the Johannine corpus is well known. John 3:16 does not define the extent of 'kosmos'. [Note 9] However, a few things are certain: it is not the "world" that Jesus says He does not pray for in John 17:9, a "world" that is differentiated from those the Father has given Him: "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours." [Note 10] It is not the "world" that is arrayed as an enemy against God's will and truth, either, as seen in 1 John 2:15: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Obviously, the "world" we are not to love in 1 John 2:15 is not the world God showed His love toward by sending His unique Son. [Note 11] The most that can be said by means of exegesis (rather than by insertion via tradition) is that the world is shown love through the giving of the Son so that a specific, particular people receive eternal life through faith in Him. Since we know that not all are saved by faith in Christ, it is utterly unwarranted to read into 'kosmos' some universal view of humanity: [Note 12] How is God's love shown for one who experiences eternal punishment by the provision of salvation for someone else? [Note 13] Surely, then, this is a general use of 'kosmos', with more specific uses of the term coming in the following verses. That is, the common meaning of world that would have suggested itself to the original readers (Jew and Gentile), and this is born out by the parallel passage in 1 John 4, as we will see below. [Note 14]

Whoever Believes

See comments above regarding the meaning of 'pas ho pisteuwn'. There is no phrase or term here that indicates a universal ability to believe as is so often assumed by those reading this passage. [Note 15]

The present tense of the participle should be emphasized, however. John's use of the present tense "believe" is very significant, especially in light of his use of the aorist to refer to false believers. [Note 16] The ones who receive eternal life are not those who believe once, but those who have an ongoing faith. [Note 17] This is his common usage in the key soteriological passages (John 3, 6, 10). When one examines Christ's teaching concerning who it is that truly believes in this fashion we discover that it is those who are given to Him by the Father (John 6:37-39) who come to Him and who believe in Him in saving fashion. [Note 18]

Verse 18 continues the point by insisting that the one believing in Christ is not condemned/judged (Greek: krinetai). However, the one not believing has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of Christ (both "has been judged" and "has not believed" are perfect tense, indicating a completed action that is not awaiting a future fulfillment).[Note 19] Just as Paul teaches that the wrath of God is continually being revealed against children of wrath, John tells us that the wrath of God abides upon those who do not obey the Son (John 3:36).[Note 20]

Salvation, Not Judgment

Verse 17 expands upon the reason why God sent the Son into the world. The primary purpose was not for condemnation. Given the fact that Jesus speaks often of His role as judge and His coming as something that brings judgment (John 3:19, 5:22, and 9:39), it would be best to render the term "condemnation" in this context. English usage and tradition again conspire to rob the due force of the adversative hina clause: that is, many see "but that the world might be saved" as some kind of weak affirmation, when in fact the idea is, "God did not send the Son for purpose X, but instead, to fulfill purpose Y." The hina clause expresses God's purpose in the sending of the Son. It does not contain some kind of sense that "God did this which might result in that, if this happens...." While the subjunctive can be used in conditional sentences, it is also used in purpose/result clauses without the insertion of the idea of doubt or hesitant affirmation. The word "might" then is not to be read "might as in maybe, hopefully, only if other things happen" but "might" as in "I turned on the printer so that I might use it to print out this letter." Purpose, not lack of certainty. [Note 21]

Of course, this immediately raises another theological question, however. Will God save the world through Christ? If one has inserted the concept of "universal individualism" into "world" in verse 16, and then insists (against John's regular usage) that the same meaning be

carried throughout a passage, such would raise real problems. However, there is no need to do this. When we see the world as the entirety of the kinds of men (Jew and Gentile, or as John expresses it in Revelation 5:9, every "tribe, tongue, people and nation" = world) the passage makes perfect sense. God's love is demonstrated toward Jew and Gentile in providing a single means of salvation for both (Paul's main point in Romans 3-4), so too it is that He will accomplish that purpose in the sending of the Son. He will save "the world," that is, Jews and Gentiles. [Note 22]

A Parallel Passage

1 John 4:7-10 - 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

This passage provides us with a tremendous commentary, from John himself, on the passage we have just examined from his Gospel. The repetition of key phrases in the same contexts show us how closely related the two passages are. Both passages speak of God's love; both speak of God's sending of His Son and how this is a manifestation of God's love; both speak of life and the forgiveness of sin, often using the very same words John used to record John 3:16ff. So how did the Apostle John understand those words? Here we are given that insight.

The context of this passage is love among believers. Love comes from God, and it is natural for the one who has been born of God to love. The redeemed person loves because God is love, and those who know God seek to be like Him. Those who do not walk in love are betraying any claim they may make to know Him. This brings us to the key verses, 9-10.

The fact that verse nine is meant to be a restatement of John 3:16 can be seen by placing them in parallel to one another:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world

1 John 4:9 By this the love of God was manifested in us

John 3:16 that He gave His only begotten Son

1 John 4:9 that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world

John 3:16 that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life

1 John 4:9 so that we might live through Him

Once we see the clear connection, and recognize the background of John's words, we can use 1 John 4:9 to shed light upon some of the key issues regarding the proper interpretation of John 3:16ff. For example, we concluded above that "world" meant the world of humanity, i.e., Jew and Gentile taken in kind and not in universal particularity (each and every person). This is confirmed by John's rephrasing here, "By this the love of God was manifested to us." The "us" in this immediate context is identified in verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another," i.e., the Christian fellowship, which is made up of Jews and Gentiles. [Note 23] Further, the issue of the intention of God in sending the Son is further illuminated by noting the teaching of 1 John as well. That is, John 3:17 says it was the Father's intention to save the world through Christ. This we know Christ accomplished (Revelation 5:9-10) by saving men from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (this comprising the same group seen in John 6:37 who are given by the Father to the Son). 1 John 4:10 summarizes the entire work of God by saying that God's love is shown in His sending Christ as the propitiation for our sins. This is paralleled here with verse 9, "God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." This helps to explain the oft-cited words of 1 John 2:2. The "whole world" of 1 John 2:2 would carry the same meaning we have already seen: the whole world of Jew and Gentile. The thrust of 1 John 2:2 is that there are more who will experience the benefit of Christ's propitiatory death than just the current Christian communion. [Note 24]The message continues to move out into the world, and as it does so, God draws His elect unto Himself, those that He joined to Jesus Christ so that His death is their death, His resurrection their resurrection. But in none of these passages do we find any reference to a work of Christ that is nonspecific and universal with reference to individuals, let alone one that is not perfectly accomplished. God's manifestation of His love does not fail. [Note 25]

Back to You, Dave...

Now as you can see, Dave, I addressed many of your assertions in passing in exegeting this passage. Indeed, you often used the argument in your book, in different forms but always with the same conclusion, "White (or other Calvinist author) ignored/avoided passage X, which shows that they know it contradicts their position, but are afraid to admit it." You said that I did not "even attempt to deal with the unequivocal statement in John 3:17" (p. 271). Well, as you can see above, I have no problems with John 3:17, and actually find it quite confirmatory of the Reformed exegesis of the passage.[Note 26] But just because I do not deal with a passage of Scripture that you see as

relevant does not mean I am "avoiding" it. Logically, there are two possibilities: (1) I am ignorant of its relevance (no one knows all there is to know), which would not be "avoidance," or (2) you are in error in thinking that your interpretation of said passage is relevant. In this case, I reject your interpretation of John 3:17, hence, I was not "avoiding" anything at all.

You wrote on page 270: 'But White, realizing that such an admission does away with Limited Atonement, manages a desperate end run around John 3:16. He suggests that sound exegesis requires "that whosoever believeth on him should not perish" actually means "in order that everyone believing in him should not perish...." That slight twist allows White to suggest that Calvinism's elect alone believe and thus Christ died only for them.

First, it is again improper of you to call an exegetically sound, reasoned explanation of the Greek text (something you did not offer in your own book) a "desperate end run" nor to call it a "slight twist." [Note 27] I am not desperate, Dave. I can quote my opponents correctly, for example, and I don't have to turn Arminius into a monster just to disagree with his theological conclusions. When I offer a comment on the meaning of a passage, I provide exegetical backing for my statement, as I did above. I would challenge you to provide a scholarly response to the above exegesis, one that does not depend upon misreading non-koine lexicons (as you did in regards to tassw at Acts 13:48, see below) or sandwiching your brief interpretational claims between entire sections of anti-Calvinist rhetoric (as you did in chapter 20, documented above).

Next, you seemed highly confused regarding the meaning of the term 'kosmos' on page 271. Are you asserting it always has the same meaning, especially in John? Surely you know differently. I would suggest that the only reason you choose to mock the identification of world in a way that is outside of your tradition is that your understanding of John 3:16 is so dependent upon that particular understanding that you cannot possibly allow for it to be otherwise. You have not derived the meaning of "world" or "whosoever" you insist upon from the text, but from your tradition, which has become for you equal in authority to the actual text of Scripture. [Note 28]

End Notes

1 Readers should be reminded that the Reformed interpretation of these verses is also a traditional one. Five hundred years ago, it would have been the Reformed theologian on the receiving end of the words "your view is not the only possible way of reading the words of the Lord Jesus." This is exactly what the Remonstrants told the Calvinists

at the Council of Dort, and were excluded from any meaningful contribution to its outcome. The author's use of the word "tradition" here and throughout is nothing more than a disingenuous smoke screen.

2 Interpreting "world" as inclusive of every single individual person is the proper sense in the context, and does no violence to the truth that believers are the beloved of God—the special objects of God's love. The redemptive particularity in the gospel is that believers alone are redeemed from the curse. The idea of "a denial of any particularity in God’s love, even in His redemptive love" exists only in the mind of the Reformed theologian. In the following section, the author argues correctly that the word "whosoever" means "all without distinction in a particular group." It is indeed integral to the verb "believeth" (an articular present active participle), which means that the "whosoever" of John 3:16 is strictly limited to believers. Any attempt to assign a universal meaning to "whosoever" is untenable. This fact, however, does not disprove or diminish the idea of an all-inclusive atonement.

3	This statement lacks cogency. Is there any indication in the text that the people had considered other choices? In their confrontation with certain death, they had abandoned all hope of any solution outside of what Moses might be able to secure from God through prayer.
4	This statement misses the point. There was no population outside of that community with a serpent problem, and no indication is given from the text that all of the Israelites had been bitten. The real point is that God provided a means of deliverance for every one who was suffering from the affliction. Our Lord's analogy, if properly understood, is sufficient in itself to render inept the TULIP of Calvinism.
5	This statement is correct. The author stumbles upon the truth here by acknowledging that failure to look in faith upon the God-provided means of healing actually limited the efficaciousness of the provision. This is an indirect and inadvertent admission that some for whom the provision was made (23,000) died without taking the look of faith.

6 The author makes an assertion he cannot prove. The NASB is the child of modern textual criticism. Any claims that the Majority Text expanded the original or that the NASB contains the more accurate textual reading is purely subjective. It is unwise to assume that modern textual criticism has produced any translation superior to the Authorized 1611 KJV. One wonders why the author seeks to make this point since it adds nothing to the substance of his argument.

7 This comment is disingenuous. The pre-existing tradition, as the author likes to call it, does in fact capture the meaning of "to this extent" or "in this manner". I have never heard an evangelical expositor of any stripe disassociate the adverb "so" from the verb

"gave" as an expression of sentimentalism. The manner of the love is inseparable from the magnitude of the gift! The author simply misrepresents the facts here.

8 Calvinism has no claim on this position. There are thousands of sound Bible expositors that reject the TULIP theory altogether who would agree wholeheartedly that God has purposed to give life eternal to all who believe. Thus far there is nothing remotely Calvinistic about the author's attempt at exegesis except the idea of provision for a limited population, which we have already shown to be baseless.

9 A false assertion! In John 3:16, the Lord Jesus absolutely defined the extent of the 'kosmos' as the world of the perishing—a world consisting of all who are afflicted by sin and its curse. Only the biased exegete could overlook this most obvious truth. The real issue, however, is whether the context of John 3:16 restricts or limits the extent of 'kosmos' in any way. The assertion that John 3:16 does not define the extent of 'kosmos' is nothing more than a subtle yet futile attempt to limit the group for whom a means of deliverance was provided—a limit disallowed by Jesus Himself in the wilderness illustration!

Is there any reason why 'kosmos' should be understood in any way other than the whole of humanity (Jews and Gentiles) unless the context clearly restricts it? Since nothing in the context restricts the meaning, it should be taken in its normal sense. John 3:16 marks the sixth usage of 'kosmos' in John's gospel. Nothing in the five previous usages (1:9-10, 29) restricts the meaning. However, the TULIP theologian must restrict its meaning any way he can so he can read that meaning back into 1:29, thus limiting to the elect the sin that the Lamb of God was taking away. The entire TULIP system collapses if "world" (kosmos) is inclusive of all men without exception.

10 This argument has no merit. John 17 is a high priestly prayer, and no one would expect the High Priest of believers to intercede for unbelievers in this capacity. The fact is Jesus prayed for those who would believe on Him through their word, all of whom were part of the world at the time, including the apostle Paul (17:20). In 17:21, he prays for unity, so that the world may believe that the Father had sent Him—a prayer for the salvation of the world through the unity and testimony of His disciples.

In 17:23, Jesus reiterates the petition for unity, so that the world may know that the Father had sent Him. The relationship is one of object and indirect object. Believers are the direct object of our Lord's prayer. The world is the indirect object as they are directly affected by action (or prayer answered) in the object. On another occasion, Jesus prayed for the worldlings who crucified him, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). It is apparent at this

point that the author suffers from a certain blindness created by his own tradition.

11 What we have in I John 2:15-17 is a usage of 'kosmos' that speaks of the system of organized evil over which the devil presides without regard for its human subjects. Jesus did not die for a system, but for sinners entrapped within the system. The logic employed by the author, if believed, would curtail immediately all evangelistic effort, and would potentially make love for the lost a sin. Why? Because the evangelist might possibly find himself laboring in love over one for whom Jesus had no love nor any intention to love. Moreover, Jesus loved a rich man who rejected His word, and no evidence exists that he ever became a believer (Mark 10:21-22). This man was most certainly in the 'kosmos' of John 3:16. Paul told the Colossians that prior to faith in Christ they were aliens and enemies in their minds by wicked works (1:21). They were arrayed against God as part of the world. What is obvious and certain is that there is nothing obvious nor certain about the author's conclusions. He is desperately attempting to lay spurious groundwork for a world that equates to the world of the elect.

12 We have already shown that the author's alleged exegesis has significant blind spots due to his own tradition, and that reading a universal view of humanity into John 3:16 is entirely warranted. As a typical Reformed theologian, the author blunders in failing to distinguish between the provision and its appropriation. Jesus made the distinction absolutely clear! The fact that not all are saved by faith in Christ simply means that many for whom the provision was made died in their sins due to failure to appropriate the provision. Again, the author knows that if the 'kosmos' in John 3:16 includes all men without exception, the TULIP is dead—period!

13 The author now assumes as fact that which he has failed to prove, and states his belief that God saves all whom He loves and all for whom he provided a means of deliverance, implying that those who die in unbelief and endure eternal punishment were never loved in the first place. This statement violates the Numbers 21:5ff analogy employed by Jesus. It also suggests that the only people who died of snakebite were those who were bitten before the means of deliverance was provided, and that no one died after the provision was made (i.e., all who were bitten believed, looked and lived). The passage does not support such conjecture, especially since 23,000 died without any reference to the provision's unavailability. But if such was the case, the analogy could be ridiculously stretched to teach that after Christ died on the Cross (i.e., after the provision was made), the only people that God reckoned as sinners (i.e., bitten by the deadly affliction of sin) were the elect, for it would be impossible for any to perish for

whom the provision was made. This much is certain! If so much as one Israelite died of snakebite AFTER the brazen serpent was raised and offered as a means of healing, the TULIP is dead!

14 There is no question that, in the mind of Nicodemus, the word 'kosmos' would have immediately prompted the idea of Gentile in addition to Jew. But it is absurd to argue that Nicodemus thought in terms of a limited number of Jews, and that the introduction of the word 'kosmos' suggested in his mind a limited number of Gentiles as well. What this 'general use' would have suggested to both Nicodemus and the original readers is Jews and Gentiles without regard for limitations. Any attempt to restrict the scope of 'kosmos' in John 3:16 is evidence of doctrinal bias looking for a manufactured proof text.

15 Nor is there any phrase or term that indicates a universal inability to believe. The Numbers 21:5ff passage, as used by Jesus, makes it abundantly clear that any and every man who was snake bitten had the ability to look upon the means of deliverance. The fact is no man can believe except God enable him. There are tens of thousands of TULIP-rejecting Biblicists like myself who would deny any ability in a lost man to believe on the Lord Jesus apart from his drawing grace!

16 The reader will notice the author offers no examples or instances to validate this statement.

17 The author is handling the Greek rather loosely here. Just what does it mean to believe once? Are we to assume that the New Testament never uses the aorist tense to describe the act of believing in a genuinely saved person? In the first five chapters of John, there are at least six usages of the aorist tense with the verbs 'receive' and 'believe' to describe genuine believers. In John 1:12, both the aorist ("as many as received him") and the present participle ("even to them that believe on his name") are used together to describe true believers. After the water to wine miracle at Cana of Galilee, the disciples of Jesus believed (aorist) on him (John 2:11). The clearest use of 'believe' in the aorist tense as applied to false believers is at the end of chapter two. This usage was by John the writer, not Jesus (2:25). In Ephesians 1:13, the phrase "after that ye believed" is an aorist active participle. The Ephesians were neither false believers nor passive in the exercise of faith! Again, it is always wise to question the motivation of any expositor who attempts to correct the plain English with the 'original' Greek in order to support a doctrinal position!

18 The author is correct regarding the dominant use of the articular present nominative participle to describe saving faith. Regarding those given to the Son by the father, this is a correct analysis as long as it is understood the Father gives to the Son those who believe. The Father gives them because they believe. They are drawn in order that they might believe, and given upon a resolute faith that keeps on believing.

The reason why they keep on believing is because the Son commits Himself to them (John 2:24), and prays for them that their faith will not fail (Luke 22:32). The verb “giveth” in 6:37 is a present participle. Jesus is describing a current process with a durative element. The Father was in the process of giving those who were believing. The verb “hath given” in 6:39 is a perfect tense signifying a completed action with abiding results. In the second usage, Jesus describes all of those who had already been given up to that moment. The interpretation that arises naturally from the passage is that the Father will continue giving to the Son in durative fashion as men continue to believe on the Son. After the initial gift is made in response to faith, it can be said that believers are a permanent gift to the Son, and that none of those given should be lost. This is the Father's will! There is nothing in the John 6 passage to suggest that the giving took place at any point prior to faith.

19 What Greek grammar justifies this meaning for the perfect tense? The perfect tense signifies a past action in a state of completion or abiding state. Depending on the context, the speaker may be in the present looking at former actions that produced the present state of completion, or looking ahead to the results that can be expected from the current state (A. T. Robertson). While the phrase "not awaiting a future fulfillment" does convey the idea of permanence, it is a rather ambiguous way of describing the essence of the perfect tense.

20 What the author is suggesting with the perfect tense argument is that God has never considered believers, without regard for when they believe, to be unbelievers. Therefore they have never been under wrath and condemnation. This is Supralapsarianism at its logical and unbiblical end. The Ephesians were the children of wrath before they believed (Ephesians 2:3). Handling the truth in such a deceitful manner is necessary for the Calvinist because John 3:36 states that those who remain in a state of unbelief shall not see life. If faith is an absolute requisite to life, as both Jesus and the two Johns affirm, then the false doctrine of regeneration-before-faith is rightfully defunct, as are all Five Points of Calvinism. So the Reformed theologian, in order to dodge the bullet fired by John the apostle, asserts that believers have never been reckoned as unbelievers. It should be noted this is not a position taken by all who regard themselves as Calvinists.

The perfect tenses as used by the Lord are best understood to stress the abiding results of a life of unbelief from the perspective of Jesus as he speaks to Nicodemus in the present. Jesus was teaching that unbelievers, with regard to both their practice and state, are as unbelieving and condemned as they will ever be. As long as they persist in unbelief, their state will not change! It would be quite difficult to argue that Jesus was teaching the irreversibility of unbelief

and the resultant state of condemnation. The manner in which Paul described the Ephesians prior to the exercise of faith validates that difficulty.

21 This is a spurious argument! Is the author willing to be consistent with this use of the 'adversative hina clause'? According to A. T. Robertson, the subjunctive is the mode of "doubtful assertion" or "doubtful statement" and expresses the idea of "probability" (A New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 309). In his own Greek grammar, W. Hersey Davis states: "The indicative is the mode of definite assertion. It is used to affirm positively, definitely, absolutely, undoubtedly...The indicative states a thing as true. The subjunctive is a mode of doubtful statement, of hesitating affirmation, of contingency" (Beginner's Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 74).

The 'hina' clause with the subjunctive mode is by far the most common New Testament vehicle for expressing purpose. In some contexts, it can suggest a high level of probability, but seldom, if ever, absolute certainty of purpose. Is the author suggesting that the addition of the Greek adversative 'alla' in connection with the 'hina' purpose clause somehow raises the level of intent from contingency to certainty? The author might have provided a few examples of its usage to express unfailing certainty of purpose (if they in fact exist) in making his argument. But the problem here is two-fold. First, the author has failed in his argument to limit the scope of 'kosmos'. Secondly, he applies an alleged grammatical rule to a verse where an unproven assumption is treated as fact.

The following passages, all of which represent Jesus speaking, literally destroy the author's assertion. To the Jews who were seeking to kill Him, Jesus said: "But I receive not testimony from man: but (adversative) these things I say, that ('hina' clause) ye might be saved (subjunctive)—John 5:34. Was every hostile Jew within hearing range of that statement certainly saved? Probably not. How about the raising of Lazarus? Jesus said to the Father: "And I knew that thou hearest me always: but (adversative) because of the people which stand by I said it, that ('hina' clause) they may believe (subjunctive) that thou hast sent me"—John 11:42. Does this mean every bystander that heard Jesus pray believed after they saw the miracle? Probably not. Here's the clincher! Jesus said: "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but (adversative) to save ('hina' clause with subjunctive) the world"—John 12:47. Does this mean Jesus will certainly save all unbelieving hearers in spite of their unbelief? Absolutely not!

In John 12:47, Jesus included unbelieving hearers in the 'kosmos' he came to save! It is also undeniable that the unbelieving hearers for

whom Jesus died will be eternally lost! Can there be any doubt that Jesus also considered the unbelieving and condemned of John 3:18 to be a part of the 'kosmos' he loved and came to save? The words of Jesus in 12:47 are the true parallel passage to John 3:16-17. What we have here with the author's 'adversative hina clause' argument is a selective application of a questionable grammatical principle to support a biased interpretation of a purported proof text. It is far more likely that the usage of this clause by Jesus in 5:34, 11:42, and 12:47 is the established and grammatically correct sense of the subjunctive with an adversative 'hina' clause, and that Jesus used it consistently in each instance. John 12:47 is a window into the mind of Christ, and demonstrates that the Five Points of Calvinism, which include the Reformed interpretation of John 3:16, never has had nor ever will have His endorsement! Again, it is always wise to question the motivation of any expositor who attempts to correct plain English with Greek in order to support a doctrinal position!

22 The author makes a presumptuous, unwarranted extrapolation. No one would dispute the world consists of all kinds of men—tribes, tongues, people, and nations. The group in Revelation 5:9, however, is not the world, but those who were redeemed out of the world.

23 The Christian fellowship is made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. Moreover, the author is not comparing scripture with scripture, but apples with oranges. Jesus was addressing a lost Jewish leader. John was writing to born again believers. It is expected that the author would sound identical themes. But reading the world of believers back into the world for whom Jesus died in John 3:16 does violence to the words of Christ. We have already shown that John 12:47 is the true parallel text to John 3:17.

24 I John 2:2 is oft-cited for good reason. John's use of “our” in referring to himself and his audience is obviously meant to include all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, without regard for the era in which they lived. By the time John wrote his first epistle, many believers were already asleep in the Lord. These were certainly included in “our” as would have been those who were yet to live and believe. The same phrase “whole world” is used in I John 5:19, and is described as that which lieth in wickedness. Here John juxtaposes we (who are of God) with the whole world (which lies in wickedness). What intellectually honest expositor would argue that the whole world of I John 5:19 is limited to the elect among Jews and Gentiles who are still unbelievers. Calvin himself argued that "under the term world, the Apostle no doubt includes the whole human race." But Calvin, like the author, contradicts himself by denying to the world world of 2:2 the same meaning as that found in 5:19. There can be 'no doubt' that John used the phrase identically on both occasions. Unbiased exegesis

requires the same meaning for both. This is another instance where the Reformed theologian lives or dies by the meaning of “world” (in this case, the “whole world”), and must restrict its meaning at any cost for his system to survive.

25 As stated previously, in none of these passages do we find any reference to a work of Christ that is limited or restricted in scope except by the unbelief of those for whom the means of deliverance was provided. The 'adversative hina clause' argument itself proves that God's desire to save the world is not perfectly accomplished. It is, however, accomplished perfectly in them that believe! The love that Jesus manifested to the rich man in Mark 10:21-22 did not produce a conversion.

26 The fact that the author considers his remarks confirmatory of the Reformed exegesis is enough evidence for any serious Bible student to abandon the TULIP immediately and altogether.

27 The author is correct in admonishing Hunt for this unsubstantiated remark, which is in itself indicative of desperation and a certain degree of ignorance. We have already shown (in agreement with the author) that the width and breadth of 'whosoever' is strictly limited to the ones who are believing. However, we have also shown that this in no way restricts the scope of the atonement. The fact is believers are the elect, and the elect are believers.

28 The author concludes with another false assertion. Most students of scripture would acknowledge that 'kosmos' can have several shades of meaning depending on the context. The problem with the author's approach is confusing the rule with the exception. There are many places where “world” implies every living soul—Jew and Gentile without distinction or exception—which is the normal sense unless the context dictates another. John 3:16 is one of those normal sense places.

As we said earlier, the 'blinded by tradition' allegation made by the author is nothing more than an attempt to demagogue and intimidate the uninformed. Jesus absolutely defined the meaning of 'kosmos' in the context! The 'kosmos' of which He spoke to Nicodemus was the world of the perishing! The world of the perishing and the world of the elect (or believers) are two distinctly different worlds. Jesus absolutely defined the extent of 'kosmos' in John 3:16-17 with His statements in John 12:47, including within that 'kosmos', which was the object of His love, all who hear His words and reject them. The author's Reformed interpretation of John 3:14-18 should therefore be rejected as untenable.

Conclusion

Are you a Five Point Calvinist? Have you been guilty of lifting proof texts from their contexts to justify the doctrines of Calvinism? Are you constantly reading works from reputed Calvinists in an effort to convince yourself that so many 'scholars' could not possibly be wrong about TULIP? If so, this volume should have convinced you that there is NO biblical basis whatsoever for ANY of the Five Points!

We are living in perilous times. What has come to pass for sound doctrine is rather incredible. Satan, the god of this world, is attacking the church from many angles. It won't be long before pastors and churches who stand for biblical morality will be attacked by Government and the LGTBQ lobby to cease and desist opposition to homosexual sin or face seizure of their property and assets by the IRS. This is just one example of the overt attacks on the church of Jesus Christ. Calvinism, on the other hand, is a covert attack on the church. Unlike other overt attacks that are more recent in American history, Calvinism has been around for several hundred years. Make no mistake! Calvinism is an attack on the church of Jesus Christ inasmuch as it eviscerates the gospel.

Evidence of its subtle yet destructive influence is the number of churches that are in turmoil, in the process of splitting or, having already split, have given birth to new congregations that are Calvinistic to the core. Is this the kind of ecclesiastical activity truth and sound doctrine produce? James gave us the following inspired guideline for wisdom: “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:13-18).

Wisdom and meekness go hand in hand where wise men are concerned. The wise man, endued with wisdom from above, espouses knowledge that is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated by its hearers. It's merciful, bears good fruit, void of hypocrisy, especially where the gospel is concerned. The spread of Calvinism has been marked by congregational strife and confusion. Church turmoil and church splits are under the umbrella of evil works. One would be hard pressed to find ANY instance of Calvinism invading a local church where its doctrines were sown in peace and fostered good fruit. The exact opposite is most often the case. Reformed Theology, or Calvinism, is a glaring example of the wisdom that is earthly, sensual

and devilish. It's NOT from above! The intellectually honest student of scripture should toss TULIP doctrine into file thirteen where it belongs. It's manifestly gospel deficient!